

# PUBLIC SPEAKING HANDBOOK

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# Analyzing Your Audience

**I**t seemed harmless enough. Charles Williams was asked to speak to the Cub Scout pack about his experience as a young cowboy in Texas. The boys were learning to tie knots, and Williams, a retired rancher, could tell them how to make a lariat and how to make and use other knots.

His speech started out well. He seemed to be adapting to his young audience. However, for some reason, Williams thought the boys might also enjoy learning how to exterminate the screw worm, a pesky parasite of cattle. In the middle of his talk about roping cattle, he launched into a presentation about the techniques for sterilizing male screw worms. The parents in the audience fidgeted in their seats. The 7- and 8-year-olds didn't have the foggiest idea what a screw worm was, what sterilization was, or how male and female screw worms mate.

It got worse; his audience analysis skills deteriorated even more. Williams next talked about castrating cattle. Twenty-five minutes later he finally finished the screw-worm-castration speech. The parents were relieved. Fortunately, the boys hadn't understood it.

Williams's downfall resulted from his failure to analyze his audience. He may have had a clear objective in mind, but he hadn't considered the background or knowledge of his listeners. Audience analysis is essential for any successful speech.

*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

## 5.a

### Becoming an Audience-Centered Speaker

The key elements in communication are source, receiver, message, channel. All four elements are important, but perhaps the most important is the receiver. In public speaking, the receiver is the audience, and the audience is the reason for a speech event.

In Chapter 2, we presented a model that provides an overview of the entire process of speech preparation and delivery; the model is shown again in Figure 5.1. We stressed in Chapter 2 and reemphasize here the concept of public speaking as an audience-centered activity. At each stage in crafting your speech, you must be mindful of your audience. The audience-analysis skills and techniques that we present in this chapter will help you throughout the public-speaking process. Consciousness of your audience



**FIGURE 5.1** Audience Analysis Is Central to the Speechmaking Process

will be important 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.

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

How do you become an audience-centered speaker? There are two steps. First, analyze your audience to assess who your listeners are; identify their psychological profile, and consider the occasion for your speech. Second, once you have analyzed your audience, you'll use the information you've gathered to adapt to them in an ethical way. As our audience-centered model illustrates, each decision you make when design-

ing and delivering your message should consider the needs and backgrounds of your audience. Let's consider these two steps in more detail.

## ANALYZE YOUR AUDIENCE

**Audience analysis** is the process of examining information about the listeners who will hear your speech. That analysis helps you adapt your message so that your listeners will respond as you wish. You analyze audiences every day as you speak to others or join in group conversations. For example, most of us do not deliberately make offensive comments to family members or friends. Rather, we adapt our messages to the individuals with whom we are speaking.

## ADAPT TO YOUR AUDIENCE

**Audience adaptation** is the process of ethically using information you've gathered when analyzing your audience to help your audience clearly understand your message and to achieve your speaking objective. If you only analyze your audience but don't use the information to customize your message, the information 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 maintain your listeners' attention and make them more receptive to your ideas.

Here's an example of how analyzing and adapting to others works: Mike spent a glorious spring break at Daytona Beach. He and three friends piled in a car and headed for a week of adventure. When he returned from the beach, sunburned and fatigued from merrymaking, people asked how his holiday went. He described his escapades to his best friend, his mother, and his communication professor.

To his best friend, he bragged, "We partied all night and slept on the beach all day. It was great!" He informed his mother, "It was good to relax after the hectic pace of college." And he told his professor, "It was mentally invigorating to have time to think things out." It was the same vacation—but how different the messages were! Mike adapted his message to the people he addressed; he had analyzed his audiences.

**Audience-Centered Questions** When you are speaking in public, you should use the same process Mike used in reporting on his spring break. The principle is simple, yet powerful: An effective public speaker is audience-centered. Several key questions can help you formulate an effective approach to your audience:

To whom am I speaking?

What does my audience expect from me?

What topic would be most suitable to my audience?

What is my objective?

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?

What language or linguistic differences do audience members have?

What method of organizing information will be most effective?

Being audience-centered does not mean 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. It was President Truman who pondered, “I wonder how far Moses would have gone if he’d taken a poll in Egypt?”

The audience-centered speaker adjusts his or her topic, purpose, central idea, main ideas, supporting materials, organization, and even delivery of the speech so as to encourage the audience to listen to his or her ideas. The goal is to make the audience come away from the speaking situation, if not persuaded, then at least feeling thoughtful rather than offended or hostile.

In this chapter, you will learn both formal and informal strategies for gathering information about your audience. You will examine ways to analyze and adapt to your audience before, during, and after your speech. You will also learn to use the information you gather to achieve your purpose.

## 5.b

## Analyzing Your Audience Before You Speak

It is unlikely that audience members for the speeches you give in class will have similar backgrounds. In most colleges and universities, the range of cultural backgrounds, ethnic ties, and religious traditions within the student body is rapidly expanding. Learning about your audience members’ backgrounds and attitudes can help you in selecting a topic, defining a purpose, and developing an outline, and in other speech-related activities. It is important to analyze your audience before doing anything else. We will discuss three basic dimensions you can use for prespeech analysis:

1. Demographic audience analysis
2. Psychological audience analysis
3. Situational audience analysis

### DEMOGRAPHIC AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

A basic approach to analyzing an audience is to identify its demographic makeup. **Demographics** are statistics on population characteristics such as age, race, gender, educational level, and religious views. In essence, demographic information provides clues to help you determine how to adapt to your listeners. Let’s consider how **demographic audience analysis** can help you better understand your audience.

**Age** Knowing the age of your audience can be very helpful in choosing your topic and approach. Although you must use caution in generalizing from only one fac-

tor such as age, that information can suggest the kinds of examples, humor, illustrations, and other types of supporting material to use in your speech.

For example, many students in your public-speaking class will probably be in their late teens or early twenties. Some, however, may be older. The younger students may know the latest rap performers or musicians, for example, but the older ones may not be familiar with Ludacris, UGK, or OutKast. If you are going to give a talk on rap music, you will have to explain who the performers are and describe or demonstrate their style if you want all the members of your class to understand what you are talking about.

**Gender** Josh began his speech by thanking his predominantly female audience for taking time from their busy schedules to attend his presentation on managing personal finances. Not a bad way to begin a talk. He continued, however, by noting that their job of raising children, keeping their homes clean, and feeding their families was among the most important tasks in America. Josh thought he was paying his audience a compliment. He did not consider that today, most women work outside the home as well as in it. Many of his listeners were insulted. Many of his listeners stopped being listeners.

**AVOID GENDER STEREOTYPES.** A key question to ask when considering your audience is, “What is the ratio of males to females?” No matter what the mix, avoid making sweeping judgments based on gender stereotypes. A person’s **sex** is determined by biology, as reflected in his or her anatomy and reproductive systems; someone is born either male or female. **Gender** is the culturally constructed and psychologically based perception of one’s self as feminine or masculine. One’s gender-role identity, which falls somewhere on the continuum from masculine to feminine, is learned or socially reinforced by others as well as by one’s own personality and life experiences; genetics also plays a part in shaping gender role identity.

Although you can certainly make some legitimate assumptions about topics that might interest people of each gender, it would be as inappropriate to assume that all males are sports fanatics as to conclude that all females enjoy an evening at the ballet. Instead, try to ensure that your remarks reflect sensitivity to diversity in your listeners’ points of view.

**AVOID SEXIST LANGUAGE.** One goal of an audience-centered speaker is to avoid sexist language or remarks. A sexist perspective stereotypes or prejudices how someone will react based on his or her sex. Take time to educate yourself about what words, phrases, or perspectives are likely to offend or create psychological noise for your listeners. Think carefully about the implications of words or phrases you take for granted. For example, many people still use the words *ladies* or *matrons* without thinking about their connotations in U.S. culture. Be especially wary about jokes. Many are derogatory to one sex or the other. Avoid stereotypes in your stories and examples as well.

**BE INCLUSIVE.** Make your language, and your message, as inclusive as possible. If you are speaking to a mixed audience, make sure your speech relates to all your listeners, not just to one gender. If, for example, you decided to discuss breast cancer, you

could note that men, too, can be victims of breast cancer and that the lives of husbands, fathers, and brothers of victims are affected by the disease.

**AVOID GENDER ASSUMPTIONS.** Finally, be cautious about assuming that men and women will respond differently to your message. Early social science research found some evidence that females were more susceptible to efforts to persuade them than were males.<sup>1</sup> For many years textbooks and communication teachers presented this conclusion to students. More contemporary research, however, suggests there may be no major differences between men and women in susceptibility to persuasive messages.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, although some research suggests women are socialized to be more emotional and empathic than men, other evidence suggests men can be equally sensitive.<sup>3</sup> It is clear there are learned sex differences in language usage and nonverbal behavior, but we caution against making sweeping gender-based assumptions about your audience.

**Sexual Orientation** Another demographic factor to consider about your audience is sexual orientation. Whether you approve or disapprove of a person's sexual orientation, your attitudes and beliefs should not interfere with your goal of being an effective, audience-centered public speaker. An audience-centered speaker is sensitive to issues and attitudes about sexual orientation in contemporary society.

**MONITOR LANGUAGE, EXAMPLES, AND HUMOR.** What strategies can help you walk the fine line between being inclusive and being aware of the range of attitudes about gays and lesbians that members of your audience may hold? We encourage you to be mindful of the examples and language that you use so that you do not alienate a significant part of your audience and thereby prevent them from focusing on your message. The audience-centered speaker's goal is to enhance understanding rather than create noise that may distract the audience from becoming listeners, regardless of the attitudes or beliefs audience members may hold about sexual orientation.

Specifically, monitor how you talk about sexual orientation when delivering a public presentation. You already know that it is inappropriate to use racially charged terms that demean a person's race or ethnicity; it is equally important not to use terms that degrade a person's sexual orientation. Similarly, stories, illustrations, and humor whose points or punch lines rely on ridiculing a person because of his or her sexual orientation may lower perceptions of your credibility not only among gay and lesbian members of your audience, but also among audience members who disdain bias against gays and lesbians.

People evaluate credibility by behavior, not by intentions. Sometimes we unintentionally offend someone through more subtle misuse of language. For example, gays and lesbians typically prefer to be referred to as "gay" or "lesbian" rather than as "homosexual." Further, it is not appropriate to single out gays and lesbians as a separate category of people who are assumed to hold political, ideological, or religious views different from those of straight people.

**BE INCLUSIVE.** You don't want to single out gays and lesbians—but don't ignore the existence of gays and lesbians either. Don't assume that everyone in your audience is heterosexual; sexual orientation is invisible, in the sense that you can't

typically identify someone's sexual orientation just by looking at him or her. We are not suggesting that in every speech you present you should use examples that refer to gay or lesbian people. But neither should all examples of couples assume that the two people are of the opposite sex.

Monitor your language choice and use of illustrations and humor so you don't alienate members of your audience.<sup>4</sup> No matter what your personal views on the issue of sexual orientation are, the goal is to be an effective communicator. Be sensitive in your language use; in your approach to the speech topic; and in the examples, illustrations, and humor you use.<sup>5</sup> Make your points so that you communicate competently, effectively, and appropriately to each audience member.

**Culture, Ethnicity, and Race** **Culture** is a learned system of knowledge, behavior, attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms shared by a group of people. **Ethnicity** is that portion of a person's cultural background that relates to a national or religious heritage. A person's **race** is his or her biological heritage—for example, Caucasian or Asian. The cultural, ethnic, or racial background of your audience influences the way they perceive your message. An effective speaker adapts to differences in culture, race, and ethnicity.

**AVOID ETHNOCENTRISM.** As you approach any public-speaking situation, avoid an ethnocentric mind-set. **Ethnocentrism** is an assumption that your own cultural approaches are superior to those of other cultures. If your audience catches even a hint that you think your own cultural traditions are better than their cultural traditions, you have built walls between you and your listeners. Most of us would become defensive if a speaker visited our community and suggested that our ways of doing things were backward, ineffective, and inferior. The audience-centered speaker is sensitive to cultural differences and avoids saying things that would disparage the cultural background of the audience.

**LEARN ABOUT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES.** You need not have international students in your class to have a culturally diverse audience. A variety of ethnic and cultural traditions thrive among people who have lived in the United States all their lives. Students from a Polish family in Chicago, a German family in Texas, or a Haitian family in Brooklyn may be native U.S. citizens with cultural traditions different from your own. Effective public speakers seek to learn as much as possible about the special cultural values and knowledge of their audience so that they can understand the best way to deliver their message.

Researchers classify or describe cultural differences along several lines.<sup>6</sup> Understanding these classifications may provide clues to help you adapt your message when you speak before diverse audiences.

- **Individualistic and collectivistic cultures.** Some cultures place greater emphasis on individual achievement, whereas others place more value on group or collective achievement. Among the countries that tend to value individual accomplishment are Australia, Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Belgium, and Denmark. Japan, Thailand, Colombia, Taiwan, and Venezuela are among those that have more collectivistic cultures. Audience members from individualistic



cultures tend to value and respond to appeals that encourage personal accomplishment and single out individual achievement. Audience members from collectivistic cultures may be more likely to value group or team rewards and achievement.

- **High-context and low-context cultures.** The terms *high-context* and *low-context* refer to the importance of unspoken or nonverbal messages. In high-context cultures, people place considerable importance on such contextual factors as tone of voice, gestures, facial expression, movement, and other nonverbal aspects of communication. People from low-context traditions are just the opposite. They place greater emphasis on the words themselves; the surrounding context has a relatively low impact on the meaning of the message. The Arab culture is a high-context culture, as are those of Japan, Asia, and southern Europe. Low-context cultures, which place a high value on words, include those of Switzerland, Germany, the United States, and Australia.

Listeners from low-context cultures will need and expect more detailed and explicit information from you as a speaker. Subtle and indirect messages are less likely to be effective. People from high-context cultures will pay particular attention to your delivery and to the communication environment when they try to interpret your meaning. These people will be less impressed by a speaker who boasts about his or her own accomplishments; such an audience will expect and value more indirect ways of establishing credibility.

- **Tolerance of uncertainty and need for certainty.** Some cultures are more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty than others. Those cultures in which people prefer to have details “nailed down” tend to develop very specific regulations and rules. People from cultures with a greater tolerance of uncertainty are more comfortable with vagueness and are not upset when all the details aren’t spelled out.

Cultures with a high need for certainty include those of Russia, Japan, France, and Costa Rica. Cultures that have a higher tolerance for uncertainty include those of Great Britain and Indonesia. If you are speaking to an audience with many people who have a high need for certainty, make sure you provide concrete details when you present ideas.

- **High-power and low-power cultures.** Power is the ability to influence or control others. Some cultures prefer clearly defined lines of authority and responsibility; these are said to be high-power cultures. People in low-power cultures are more comfortable with blurred lines of authority and less formal titles. Austria, Israel, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, and Great Britain typically have an equitable approach to power distribution.

Cultures that are high on the power dimension include those of the Philippines, Mexico, Venezuela, India, Brazil, and France; people from these cultural traditions tend to respond positively to clearly defined power roles and structures. Those from low-power cultures often favor more shared approaches to leadership and governance.

**Religion** Marsha is a follower of Scientology, and she believes that Dianetics is as important as religious principles based on the Bible. Planning to speak before a Bible-belt college audience, many of whose members view Scientology as a cult, Marsha would be wise to consider how her listeners will respond to her message. This is not to suggest that she should refuse the speaking invitation. She should, however, be aware of her audience's religious beliefs as she prepares and presents her speech.

When touching on religious beliefs or an audience's values, use great care in what you say and how you say it. Remind yourself that some members of your audience will undoubtedly not share your own beliefs, and that few beliefs are held as intensely as religious ones. If you do not wish to offend your listeners, plan and deliver your speech with much thought and sensitivity.

**Group Membership** It's said we are each members of a gang—it's just that some gangs are more socially acceptable than others. We are social creatures; we congregate in groups to gain an identity, to help accomplish projects we support, and to have fun. So it's reasonable to assume that many of your listeners belong to groups, clubs, or organizations.

**LEARN ABOUT GROUP MEMBERSHIP.** Knowing what groups your listeners belong to can help you make inferences about their likes, dislikes, beliefs, and values. For example, if you are speaking to a service group such as the Lions Club or the Kiwanis Club, you can reasonably assume that your listeners value community service and will be interested in how to make their community a better place to live.

You're likely to find that most audiences have listeners who may belong to several different types of organizations. Find out which organizations your audience members have joined. Are they members of the Parents and Teachers Association, fraternities, sororities, musical groups, academic organizations, or other clubs? Being able to make specific references to the activities that your audience members may participate in can help to tailor your speech to your specific audience.

**OFFER SINCERE SUPPORT.** One way to develop common ground with an audience is to offer sincere support for the groups and causes that audience members support or to mention that you are also a member of similar organizations. Politicians know that a sure-fire way to get applause when delivering their "stump speeches" is to mention how they support the local sports team; this reference to sports is a method of establishing a positive, common bond with their listeners. We don't encourage you to offer phony flattery or fake allegiance to groups and club memberships just to get applause. But a heart-felt reference to a group or organization that both you and your audience support can help establish a link with your listeners.

**Socioeconomic Status** Socioeconomic status is a person's perceived importance and influence based on such factors as income, occupation, and education level. In Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and other parts of the world, centuries-old traditions of acknowledging status differences still exist today. North Americans often don't like to talk about or acknowledge status differences in society. The beliefs that "All people are created equal," in "Equal justice under the law," and that "All persons

are of equal worth” permeate the democratic approach to government and decision making. Status differences nonetheless exist in the United States, but they are often more subtle. Having an idea about audience members’ incomes, occupations, and education levels can be helpful as you develop a message that connects with listeners.

- **Income.** It’s considered rude to ask people how much money they make, yet having some general idea of the income level of your listeners can be of great value to you as a speaker. The amount of disposable income of your listeners can influence your topic and your approach to the topic. For example, if you know that most audience members are struggling to meet weekly expenses, it is unwise to talk about how to see the cultural riches of Europe by traveling first class. But talking about how to get paid to travel to Europe by serving as a courier may hold considerable interest.
- **Occupation.** What people do for a living also has socioeconomic status implications. Although there is often a link between income and occupation, the two do not necessarily go hand in hand. Knowing what people do for a living can give you useful information about how to adapt your message to them. Speaking to teachers gives you an opportunity to use different examples and illustrations than if you were speaking to lawyers, ministers, or automobile assembly-line workers. Many college-age students may hold jobs, but don’t yet hold the jobs they aspire to after they graduate from college. Knowing their future career plans can help you adjust your topic and supporting material to your listeners’ professional goals.
- **Education.** About one-third of U.S. high-school graduates obtain a college diploma. Less than 10 percent of the population earn graduate degrees. The educational background of your listeners is yet another component of socioeconomic status that can help you plan your message. In your college-level public-speaking class, you have a good idea that your classmates and audience members value education, because they are striving, often at great sacrifice, to advance their education. Knowing the educational background of your audience can also help you make decisions about your choice of vocabulary, your language style, and your use of examples and illustrations. For example, Mary White Eagle, a Native American from Roswell, New Mexico, was invited to speak to her daughter’s grade-school class. Although she could have talked about the oppression of her ancestors by whites, she instead selected a topic more appropriate to her listeners: She spoke about the houses that Native Americans had to build and rebuild to follow the herds of buffalo that roamed the Southwest. As an audience-centered speaker, she used her knowledge of the education level of her listeners to guide her in selecting her topic.



### **QUICK CHECK:** *Become an Audience-Centered Speaker*

- Know the age of your audience.
- Avoid making sweeping judgments based on gender stereotypes.
- Consider your audience’s sexual orientation.

- Avoid an ethnocentric mind-set.
- When touching on religious beliefs, use great care.
- Learn what groups, clubs, or organizations your audience belongs to.
- Consider your audience's socioeconomic status.
- Remember that your audience will be made up of a diversity of individuals.

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**Adapting to Diverse Listeners** The most recent U.S. census figures document what you already know from your own life experiences: We live in an age of diversity. For example,

- The U.S. foreign-born population recently topped 28 million people.<sup>7</sup>
- Immigrants among all U.S. citizens have more than doubled in the past thirty years, increasing from just under 5 percent of the population in 1970 to over 10 percent in 2001.<sup>8</sup>
- Whites are the minority ethnic group in nearly half of the largest cities in the United States.<sup>9</sup>
- For the first time in modern U.S. history, non-Hispanic whites are in the minority in California.<sup>10</sup>
- New Jersey experienced a 77 percent increase in its Asian population between 1990 and 2000.<sup>11</sup>

Virtually every state in the United States has experienced a dramatic increase in foreign-born residents. If trends continue as they have during the past quarter-century, cultural and ethnic diversity will continue to grow during your lifetime. This swell of immigrants translates to increased diversity in all aspects of society, including among the people in most audiences you'll face—whether in business, at school-board meetings, or in your college or university classes.

Audience diversity, however, involves more factors than just ethnic and cultural differences. Central to considering your audience is examining the full spectrum of audience diversity, not just cultural differences. Each topic we reviewed when discussing demographic and psychological aspects of an audience contributes to overall audience diversity. Diversity simply means differences. Audiences are diverse.

Differences in age, gender, religion, education, group membership, and psychological makeup will mean that each audience you face will consist of people with a variety of backgrounds and experiences. In your public-speaking class, you'll likely find a mix of Democrats, Republicans, and people with a variety of other political views. Contemporary student audiences also reflect increasing diversity in age and in religious views. The question and challenge for a public speaker is, "How do I adapt to listeners with such different backgrounds and experiences?" We offer several general strategies. You could decide to focus on a target audience, consciously use a variety of methods of adapting to listeners, seek to find common ground, or consider using powerful visual images to present your key points.

**FOCUS ON A TARGET AUDIENCE.** A **target audience** is a specific segment of your audience that you most want to address or influence. Just as an archer shoots an arrow toward a specific spot on the target, as a speaker you may want to customize your message to influence a certain portion of your audience, especially if your audience is diverse. You've undoubtedly been a target of skilled communicators and may not have been aware that messages had been tailored just for you. For example, most colleges and universities spend a considerable amount of time and money encouraging students to apply for admission. You probably received some of this recruitment literature in the mail during your high school years. But not every student in the United States receives brochures from the same colleges. College admissions officers have sophisticated ways of finding students they think would be a good fit for their institution. Colleges and universities targeted you based on your test scores, your interests, where you live, and your involvement in school-sponsored or extracurricular activities. Just as college admissions officers targeted you, as a public speaker, you may want to think about the portion of your audience you most want to understand your message or be convinced.

The challenge when 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, however, 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.

**USE DIVERSE STRATEGIES FOR A DIVERSE AUDIENCE.** 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. Based on your efforts to gather information about your audience, you should know the various constituencies that will likely be present for your talk. Consider using several methods of reaching the different listeners in your audience.

The use of a variety of supporting materials can appeal to people with different backgrounds. For example, some Asian and Middle Eastern cultures prefer and are more comfortable with stories and parables to make a point or support an argument. Many people from the predominant North American culture may expect more logical, statistical evidence to support an argument. Rather than relying on one or the other, when faced with audience members with different preferences and expectations, consider using both strategies—stories and logical support—to make your point.

**USE COMMON AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVES.** People have debated for a long, long time whether there are universal human values that are common to all cultures. The debate continues. Several scholars have made strong arguments that common human values do exist. Communication researcher David Kale suggests that all humans seek to protect the dignity and worth of other people.<sup>12</sup> In other words, he argues that

all people can identify with the individual struggle to enhance one's own dignity and worth, although different cultures express that in different ways.

A second common value is the search for a world at peace. Underlying such quests in a civilized society is a fundamental desire for equilibrium, balance, and stability. Although there appears to be a small but corrosive minority of people whose actions do not support the universal value of peace, the prevailing human values in most cultures ultimately support peace. As a public speaker, you could link the underlying values of personal dignity and peace to the information you share or positions you advocate.

Intercultural communication scholars Larry Samovar and Richard Porter suggest other commonalities that people from all cultures share. They propose that all humans seek physical pleasure as well as emotional and psychological pleasure and confirmation and seek to avoid personal harm.<sup>13</sup> Although each culture defines what constitutes pleasure and pain, it may be useful to interpret human behavior with these general assumptions in mind. All people also realize that their lives will end; that to some degree each person is isolated from all other human beings; that we each make choices; and that each person seeks to give life meaning. These similarities offer some basis for developing common messages with universal meaning.

The search for a truly comprehensive human communication theory continues. Noting major principles that help motivate human behavior may help you, in your role as a public speaker, to develop a message that can speak to a variety of cultural and ethnic traditions and also can transcend differences in age and gender.

#### RELY ON VISUAL MATERIALS THAT TRANSCEND LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES.

Pictures and images can communicate universal messages—especially emotional ones. Although there is no universal language, most listeners, regardless of culture and language, can comprehend visual expressions of pain, joy, sorrow, and happiness. Showing a picture of a war-ravaged Serbian village can clearly and dramatically illustrate the devastation of armed conflict, regardless of audience members' cultural backgrounds. Words alone do not have as powerful an impact. Similarly, an image of a mother holding the thin, 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.



#### QUICK CHECK: *Adapt to a Culturally Diverse Audience*

- Assess your listeners' cultural backgrounds and expectations about the speaking process.
- Assess your own cultural background, expectations, and biases about the speaking process.
- Assess the level of formality your listeners expect.
- Assess whether your listeners will respond to a linear, step-by-step structure.
- Beware of developing a message that would be effective only with people just like you; be audience-centered.

- Avoid making sweeping generalizations about your audience's culture or ethnicity.
  - Use a mix of supporting materials to make your points clear and memorable.
  - Use visual aids that have universal appeal.
  - Present stories, illustrations, and narratives with messages that span cultural backgrounds.
  - Tailor your speech to a set of target or primary listeners in your audience.
  - Identify common values and assumptions held by your listeners.
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## PSYCHOLOGICAL AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Demographic information lets you make some useful inferences about your audience and to predict likely responses. Learning how the members of your audience feel about your topic and purpose may provide specific clues about possible reactions. A **psychological audience analysis** explores an audience's attitudes toward a topic, purpose, and speaker, while probing the underlying beliefs and values that might affect these attitudes.

It is important for a speaker to distinguish among attitudes, beliefs, and values. The attitudes, beliefs, and values of an audience may greatly influence a speaker's selection of a topic and specific purpose, as well as various other aspects of speech preparation and delivery.

**Attitudes** An **attitude** reflects likes or dislikes. Do you like health food? Are you for or against capital punishment? Do you think it is important to learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)? Should movies be censored? What are your views on nuclear energy? Your answers to these widely varied questions reflect your attitudes.

**Beliefs** A **belief** is what you hold to be true or false. Beliefs underlie attitudes. Why do you like health food? You may believe natural products are better for your health. That belief explains your positive attitude. Why are you against capital punishment? You may believe it is wrong to kill people for any reason. Again, your belief explains your attitude. It is useful for a speaker to probe audience beliefs. If the speaker can understand why audience members feel as they do about a topic, he or she may be able to address that underlying belief, whether trying to change an attitude or reinforce one.

**Values** A **value** is an enduring concept of good and bad, right and wrong. More deeply ingrained than either attitudes or beliefs, values are therefore more resistant to change. Values support both attitudes and beliefs. For example, you like health food because you believe that natural products are more healthful. And you value good health. You are against capital punishment because you believe that it is wrong to kill people. You value human life. As with beliefs, a speaker who has some understanding of an audience's values is better able to adapt a speech to them.

**Analyzing Attitudes Toward the Topic** The topic of a speech provides one focus for an audience's attitudes, beliefs, and values. It is useful to know how mem-

bers 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 or against it? Knowing the answers to these questions from the outset lets you adjust your message accordingly. For example, if you plan to talk about increasing taxes to improve education in your state, you may want to know how your listeners feel about taxes and education.

**GAUGE AUDIENCE ATTITUDES.** When you are analyzing your audience, it may help to categorize the group along three dimensions: interested—uninterested, favorable—unfavorable, and captive—voluntary. With an interested audience, your task is simply to hold and amplify interest throughout the speech. If your audience is uninterested, you need to find ways to “hook” the members. Given our visually oriented culture, consider using visual aids to gain and maintain the attention of apathetic listeners.

You may also want to gauge how favorable or unfavorable your audience may feel toward you and your message before you begin to speak. Some audiences, of course, are neutral, apathetic, or simply uninformed about what you plan to say. We will provide explicit suggestions for approaching favorable, neutral, and unfavorable audiences when we discuss persuasive speaking. But even if your objective is simply to inform, it is useful to know whether your audience is predisposed to respond positively or negatively toward you or your message. Giving an informative talk about classical music would be quite challenging, for example, if you were addressing an audience full of die-hard punk-rock fans. You might decide to show the connections between classical music and punk, to arouse their interest.



## A QUESTION OF ETHICS

Marianne strongly believes that the drinking age should be raised to 22 in her state. When she surveyed her classmates, the overwhelming majority thought the drinking age should be lowered to 18. Should Marianne change the topic and purpose of her speech to avoid facing a hostile audience? Why or why not?

**Your Speech Class as Audience** You may think that your public-speaking class is not a typical audience because class members are required to attend. Your speech class is a captive audience rather than a voluntary one.

A captive audience has externally imposed reasons for being there (such as a requirement to attend class). Because class members must show up to earn credit for class, you need not worry that they will get up and leave during your speech. However, your classroom speeches are still real speeches. Your class members are certainly real people with likes, dislikes, beliefs, and values. And even though audience members may not leave the class physically, you must still keep them from leaving mentally.

You will undoubtedly give other speeches to other captive audiences. Audiences at work or at professional meetings are often captive in the sense that they may be required to attend lectures or presentations to receive continuing-education credit or as



part of their job duties. Your goal with a captive audience is the same as with other types of audiences. You should make your speech just as interesting and effective as one designed for a voluntary audience. You still have an obligation to address your listeners' needs and interests and to keep them engaged in what you have to say. A captive audience gives you an opportunity to polish your speaking skills. To be effective, a speech designed for a captive audience should not seem as if you are presenting it only because you must. Your classroom speeches should connect with your listeners so they forget they are required to be in the audience. They should listen because your message has given them new, useful information; touched them emotionally; or persuaded them to change their opinion or behavior in support of your position.



### **QUICK CHECK:** *Adapting Your Message to Different Types of Audiences*

<b>Type of Audience</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>How to Be Audience-Centered</b>
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.
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.
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	Junior high 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. Remind your listeners throughout your speech how your message relates to their lives.
Favorable	A religious group that meets to hear a group leader talk about the importance of their beliefs	Use audience interest to move them closer to your speaking goal; you may be more explicit in telling them what you would like them to do in your speech conclusion.
Neutral	Members of a school cafeteria staff who attend a lecture about the new bus schedule	Increase interest in your message by noting how your ideas relate to their lives and the lives of their family and friends.

Undecided	Members of the community who have heard both candidates running for school-board president, yet can't decide how they will vote	Help clarify issues by describing advantages and disadvantages of a proposal; provide new information that will help them be more responsive to your speaking goal.
Unfavorable	Students who attend a lecture by the university president explaining why tuition and fees will increase 15 percent next year	Be realistic in what you expect to accomplish; acknowledge their opposing point of view; consider using facts to refute misperceptions they may hold.

**Analyzing Attitudes Toward You, the Speaker** The audience's attitude toward you in your role as speaker is another factor that can influence their reaction to your speech. Regardless of how they feel about your topic or purpose, if members of an audience regard you as credible, they will be much more likely to be interested in, and supportive of, what you have to say.

Your **credibility**—being perceived as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and interesting—is one of the main factors that will shape your audience's attitude toward you. If you establish your credibility before you begin to discuss your topic, your listeners will be more likely to believe what you say and to think that you are knowledgeable, interesting, and dynamic.

When a high-school health teacher asks a former drug addict to speak to a class about the dangers of cocaine addiction, the teacher recognizes that the speaker's experiences make him credible and that his message will be far more convincing than if the teacher just lectured on the perils of cocaine use.

An audience's positive attitude toward you as a speaker can overcome negative or apathetic attitudes they may have toward your topic or purpose. If your analysis reveals that your audience does not recognize you as an authority on your subject, you will need to build your credibility into the speech. If you have had personal experience with your topic, be sure to let the audience know. You will gain credibility instantly.

## SITUATIONAL AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

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 audience analysis** includes a consideration of the time and place of your speech, the size of your audience, and the speaking occasion. Although these are not technically elements of audience analysis, they can have a major effect on how your listeners may respond to you.

**Time** You may have no control over when you will be speaking, but when designing and delivering a talk, a skilled public speaker considers the time of day as well

as audience expectations about the length of the speech. 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. If you are on a program with other speakers, speaking first or last on the program carries a slight edge, because people tend to remember what comes first or last. Speaking early in the morning when people may not be quite awake, after lunch when they may feel a bit drowsy, or late in the afternoon when they are tired may mean you'll have to strive consciously for a more energetic delivery to keep your listeners' attention.

Another aspect of time: Be mindful of your time limits. If your audience expects you to speak for 20 minutes, it is usually better to end either right at 20 minutes or even a little earlier; most North Americans don't appreciate being kept overtime for a speech. In your public-speaking class you will be given time limits, and you may wonder whether such strict time-limit expectations arise outside of public-speaking class. The answer is a most definite yes. Whether it's a business presentation or a speech to the city council or school board, time limits are often strictly enforced.

**Location** In your speech class, you have the advantage of knowing what the room looks like, but in a new speaking situation, you may 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 can affect your performance, the audience's response, and the overall success of the speech.

Room arrangement and decor may affect the way an audience responds. Be aware of the arrangement and appearance of the room in which you will speak. If your speaking environment is less than ideal, you may need to work especially hard to hold your audience's attention. Although you probably would 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 in your control.

**Size of 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 more 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. Many business "speeches" are given around a conference table.

A group of between 20 to 30 people—the size of most public-speaking classes—will expect more formality than the audience of a dozen or less. Your speaking style can still be conversational in quality, but your speech should be appropriately structured and well organized; your delivery may include more expansive gestures than you 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 is to be unamplified, you will

be expected to speak with enough volume and intensity that people in the last row can hear you.

**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 gathered for a funeral will obviously be different from that of people who've asked you to say a few words after a banquet. Knowing the occasion helps you predict both demographic characteristics of the audience as well as 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 those who've attended previous presentations what kind of audience typically gathers for the occasion. Your best source of information may be either the person who invited you to speak or someone who has attended similar events. Knowing when you will speak on the program or whether a meal will be served before or after you talk will help you gauge what your audience expects from you.

In preparing for a speaking assignment, ask the following questions, and keep the answers in mind:

1. How many people are expected to attend the speech?
2. How will the audience seating be arranged?
3. How close will I be to the audience?
4. Will I speak from a lectern?
5. Will I be expected to use a microphone?
6. Will I be on a stage or a raised platform?
7. What is the room lighting like? Will the audience seating area be darkened beyond a lighted stage?
8. Will I have adequate equipment for my visual aids?
9. Where will I appear on the program?
10. Will there be noise or distractions outside the room?

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.

Also keep in mind that when you arrive to give your speech, you can make changes in the previous speaker's room arrangements. For example, the purpose of the speaker immediately before Yue Hong was to generate interest in a memorial for Asian Americans who fought in Vietnam. Because he wanted to make sure the audience felt free to ask questions, he asked to have the chairs arranged in a semicircle and made sure the lights were turned on. But Yue Hong was giving a more formal presentation on the future of the Vietnamese population, which included a brief slide show. So when the preceding speaker had finished, Yue Hong rearranged the chairs and darkened the room.

**QUICK CHECK:** *Analyze the Speaking Situation*

- How many people are expected to attend?
- How will the audience seating be arranged?
- How close will you be to the audience?
- Will you speak from a lectern?
- Will you be expected to use a microphone?
- Will you be on a stage or raised platform?
- What is the room lighting like?
- Will you have the appropriate equipment for your visual aids?
- Where will you appear on the program?
- Will there be noise or distractions outside the room?
- What is the occasion that brings the audience together?

**GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR AUDIENCE**

Now that we have discussed why you should do a demographic, psychological, and situational analysis of your audience, you may wonder, “How do I go about researching all this information about my audience?” As an audience-centered speaker, you should try to find out as much as you can about the audience before planning the speech. There are two approaches you can take: informal and formal. Let’s look at these two approaches in detail.

**Informal Analysis** To analyze your audience informally, you can simply observe them and ask questions before you speak. Informal observations can be especially important in helping you assess obvious demographic characteristics. For example, you can observe how many members of your audience are male or female, and you can also make some inferences from their appearance about their educational level, ethnic or cultural traits, and approximate age.

If, for example, you were going to address your local PTA meeting about a new store you were opening to help students and parents develop science projects, you could attend a PTA meeting before your speaking date. Note the general percentage of men and women in the audience. Note the ages of the parents who attend. You could also ask whether most parents who show up for PTA meetings are parents of elementary, middle-school, or high-school students. Knowing these key pieces of information will help you tailor your speech to address your listeners’ interests.

Also talk with people who know something about the audience you will be addressing. If you are invited to speak to a group you have not spoken to before, ask the person who invited you some general questions about the audience members: What is their average age? What are their political affiliations? What are their religious beliefs? What are their attitudes toward your topic? Try to get as much information as possible about your audience before you give your speech.

**Formal Analysis: Surveys and Questionnaires** Rather than relying only on inferences drawn from your own observations and conversations, if time and resources permit, you may want to conduct a more formal survey of your listeners to gather both demographic data and information about their attitudes, beliefs, and values. How do you develop a formal survey? First, decide what you want to know about your audience that you don't already know. Let your topic and the speaking occasion help you determine the kinds of questions you should pose. Once you have an idea of what you would like to know, you can ask your potential audience straightforward questions about such demographic information as age, sex, occupation, and memberships in professional organizations. Figure 5.2 shows a sample questionnaire.

You can modify the questionnaire in Figure 5.2 according to your audience and topic. If your topic concerns the best approach to finding a rental apartment and you are speaking in a suburban area, find out how many members of your audience own a home and how many are presently living in an apartment. You may also want to ask how they found their current apartment, how many are now searching for an apartment, and how many anticipate searching for one. Answers to these questions can give you useful information about your audience and may also provide examples to use in your presentation.

## Demographic Audience-Analysis Questionnaire

1. Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_
2. Sex: Male  Female
3. Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Religious affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Marital status: Married  Single  Divorced
6. Major in school: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Years of schooling beyond high school: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Annual income: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Ethnic background: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Hometown and state: \_\_\_\_\_
12. Political affiliation: Republican  Democrat  Other  None
13. Membership in professional or fraternal organizations: \_\_\_\_\_

**FIGURE 5.2** Demographic Audience-Analysis Questionnaire

Although knowing your audience's demographics can be helpful, again we caution you that inferences based on generalized information may lead to faulty conclusions. For example, it might seem reasonable to infer that if your audience consists mainly of 18- to 22-year-olds, they will not be deeply interested in retirement programs. But unless you have talked to them specifically about these topics, your inference may be incorrect. Whenever possible, ask specific questions about audience members' attitudes.

**TYPES OF QUESTIONS.** To gather useful information about audience members' attitudes, beliefs, and values, you can ask two basic types of questions. **Open-ended questions** allow for unrestricted answers, without limiting answers to choices or alternatives. Use open-ended questions when you want more detailed information from your audience. Essay questions, for example, are open-ended. **Closed-ended questions** offer several alternatives from which to choose. Multiple-choice, true/false, and agree/disagree questions are examples of closed-ended questions.

After you develop the questions, it is wise to test them on a small group of people to make sure they are clear and will encourage meaningful answers. Suppose you plan to address an audience about school-based health clinics that dispense birth-control pills in high schools. The sample questions in Figure 5.3 illustrate various open and closed questions that might be used in gathering audience information formats.

## 5.c

## Adapting to Your Audience as You Speak

So far, we have focused on discovering as much as possible about an audience before the speaking event. Prespeech analyses help with each step of the public-speaking process: selecting a topic, formulating a specific purpose, gathering supporting material, identifying major ideas, organizing the speech, and planning its delivery. Each of these components depends on understanding your audience. But audience analysis and adaptation do not end when you have crafted your speech. They continue as you deliver your speech.

### NONVERBAL CLUES

Generally, a public speaker does not have an exchange with the audience unless the event is set up in a question-and-answer or discussion format. Once the speech is in progress, the speaker must rely on nonverbal clues from the audience to judge how people are responding to the message.

Once, when speaking in India, Mark Twain was denied eye contact with his listeners by a curtain separating him from his audience. Mark Twain's daughter Clara recalled this experience: "One of Father's first lectures was before a Purdah audience; in other words, the women all sat behind a curtain through which they could peek at Mark Twain without being seen by him . . . a deadly affair for the poor humorist, who had not even the pleasure of scanning the faces of his mute audience."<sup>14</sup> Mark Twain missed learning how well his speech was being received as he was speaking. You could

## Sample Questions

### Open-Ended Questions

1. What are your feelings about having high-school health clinics that dispense birth-control pills?
2. What are your reactions to the current rate of teenage pregnancy?
3. What would you do if you discovered your child was receiving birth control pills from your high-school health clinic?

### Closed-Ended Questions

1. Are you in favor of dispensing birth-control pills to high-school students in school-based health clinics?  
Yes  No
2. Birth-control pills should be given to high-school students who ask for them in school-based health clinics. (Circle the statement that best describes your feeling.)  
Agree strongly   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Disagree strongly
3. Check the statement that most closely reflects your feelings about school-based health clinics and birth-control pills.
  - Students should receive birth-control pills in school-based health clinics whenever they want them, without their parents' knowledge.
  - Students should receive birth-control pills in school-based health clinics whenever they want them, as long as they have their parents' permission.
  - I am not certain whether students should receive birth-control pills in school-based health clinics.
  - Students should not receive birth-control pills in school-based health clinics.
4. Rank the following statements about school-based health clinics and birth-control pills, from most desirable (1) to least desirable (5).
  - Birth-control pills should be available to all high-school students in school-based health clinics, whenever students want them, and even if their parents are not aware that they are taking the pills.
  - Birth-control pills should be available to all high-school students in school-based health clinics, but only if their parents have given their permission.
  - Birth-control pills should be available to high-school students without their parents' knowledge, but not in school-based health clinics.
  - Birth-control pills should be available to high-school students, but not in school-based health clinics, and only with their parents' permission.
  - Birth-control pills should not be available to high-school students.

FIGURE 5.3 Sample Questions



experience the same disadvantage if you fail to look at your listeners while you're speaking.

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. We assure you that with experience you can develop the sensitivity to adapt to your listeners, much as a jazz musician adapts to the other musicians in the ensemble, but it will take practice. Although it's not possible to read your listeners' minds, it is important to analyze and adapt to cues that can enhance the effectiveness of your message. The first step in developing this skill is to be aware of the often unspoken clues that your audience either is hanging on every word or is bored. After learning to "read" your audience, you then need to consider developing a repertoire of behaviors to help you connect with your listeners.

## IDENTIFYING NONVERBAL AUDIENCE CUES

**Eye Contact** Perhaps the best way to determine whether your listeners are maintaining interest in your speech is to note the amount of eye contact they have with you. The more contact they have, the more likely it is that they are listening to your message. If you find them looking down at the program (or, worse yet, closing their eyes), you can reasonably guess that they have lost interest in what you're talking about.

**Facial Expression** Another clue to whether an audience is "with you" is facial expression. Members of an attentive audience not only make direct eye contact but also have attentive facial expressions. Beware of a frozen, unresponsive face. We call this sort of expression the "in a stupor" look. The classic in a stupor expression consists of a slightly tilted head, a faint, frozen smile, and often, a hand holding up the chin. This expression may give the appearance of interest, but it more often means that the person is daydreaming or thinking of something other than your topic.

**Movement** An attentive audience doesn't move much. An early sign of inattentiveness is fidgeting fingers, which may escalate to pencil wagging, leg jiggling, and arm wiggling. Seat squirming, feet shuffling, and general body movement often indicate that members of the audience have lost interest in your message.

**Nonverbal Responsiveness** An interested audience is one whose members respond verbally and nonverbally when encouraged or invited by the speaker. When you ask for a show of hands and audience members sheepishly look at one another and eventually raise a finger or two, you can reasonably infer lack of interest and enthusiasm. Frequent applause and nods of agreement with your message are indicators of interest and support.

**Verbal Responsiveness** Not only will audiences indicate agreement nonverbally, some will also indicate their interest verbally. Audience members may shout out a response or more quietly express agreement or disagreement to people seated next to them. A sensitive public speaker is constantly listening for verbal reinforcement or disagreement.

## RESPONDING TO NONVERBAL CUES

The value of recognizing nonverbal clues from your listeners is that you can respond to them appropriately. If your audience seems interested, supportive, and attentive, your prespeech analysis has clearly guided you to make proper choices in preparing and delivering your speech.

If your audience becomes inattentive, however, you may 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. Consider the following tips from seasoned public speakers for adapting to your listeners if your audience seems inattentive or bored.<sup>15</sup>

- Tell a story.
- Use an example to which the audience can relate.
- Use a personal example.
- Remind your listeners why your message should be of interest to them.
- Eliminate some abstract facts and statistics.
- Use appropriate humor.
- Make direct references to the audience, using members' names or mentioning something about them.
- Ask the audience to participate by asking questions or asking them for an example.
- Ask for a direct response, such as a show of hands, to see whether they agree or disagree with you.
- Pick up the pace of your delivery.
- Pause for dramatic effect.

If your audience seems confused or doesn't seem to understand your point:

- Be more redundant.
- Try phrasing your information in another way, or think of an example you can use to illustrate your point.
- Use a visual aid such as a chalkboard or flip chart to clarify your point.
- If you have been speaking rapidly, slow your speaking rate.
- Clarify the overall organization of your message to your listeners.
- Ask for feedback from an audience member to help you discover what is unclear.
- Ask someone in the audience to summarize the key point you are making.

If your audience seems to be disagreeing with your message:

- Provide additional data and evidence to support your point.
- Remind your listeners of your credibility, credentials, or background.

- Rely less on anecdotes and more on facts to present your case.
- Write facts and data on a chalkboard, overhead transparency, or flip chart if one is handy.
- If you don't have the answers and data you need, tell listeners you will provide more information by mail, telephone, or e-mail (and make sure you get back in touch with them).

Remember, it is not enough to note your listeners' characteristics and attitudes. You must also respond to the information you gather by adapting your speech to retain their interest and attention. Moreover, you have a responsibility to ensure that your audience understands your message. If your approach to the content of your speech is not working, alter it and note whether your audience's responses change. If all else fails, you may need to abandon a formal speaker—listener relationship with your audience and open up your topic for discussion.

Of course, in your speech class, your instructor may expect you to keep going, to fulfill the requirements for your assignment. With other audiences, however, you may want to consider switching to a more interactive question-and-answer session to ensure that you are communicating clearly. Later chapters on supporting material, speech organization, and speech delivery will discuss other techniques for adjusting your style while delivering your message.

## 5.d

## Analyzing Your Audience After You Speak

After you have given your speech, you're not finished analyzing your audience. It is important to evaluate your audience's positive or negative response to your message. Why? Because this evaluation can help you prepare your next speech. Postspeech analysis helps you polish your speaking skill, regardless of whether you will face the same audience again. From that analysis you can learn whether your examples were clear and your message was accepted by your listeners. Let's look at some specific methods for assessing your audience's response to your speech.

### NONVERBAL RESPONSES

The most obvious nonverbal response is applause. Is the audience simply clapping politely, or is the applause robust and enthusiastic, indicating pleasure and acceptance? Responsive facial expressions, smiles, and nods are other nonverbal signs that the speech has been well received.

Realize, however, that audience members from different cultures respond to speeches in different ways. Japanese audience members, for example, are likely to be restrained in their response to a speech and to show little expression. Some Eastern European listeners may not maintain eye contact with you; they may look down at the floor when listening. In some contexts, African-American listeners may enthusiastically voice their agreement or disagreement with something you say during your presentation.<sup>16</sup>

Nonverbal responses at the end of the speech may express some general feeling of the audience, but they are not much help in identifying which strategies were the most effective. Also consider what the members of the audience say, both to you and to others, after your speech.

## VERBAL RESPONSES

What might members of the audience say to you about your speech? General comments, such as “I enjoyed your talk” or “Great speech,” are good for the ego—which is important—but are not of much analytic help. Specific comments can indicate where you succeeded and where you failed. If you have the chance, try to ask audience members how they responded to the speech in general as well as to points you are particularly interested in.

## SURVEY RESPONSES

You are already aware of the value of conducting audience surveys before speaking publicly. You may also want to survey your audience after you speak. You can then assess how well you accomplished your objective. Use the same survey techniques discussed earlier. Develop survey questions that will help you determine the general reactions to you and your speech, as well as specific responses to your ideas and supporting materials. Professional speakers and public officials often conduct such surveys. Postspeech surveys are especially useful when you are trying to persuade an audience. Comparing prespeech and postspeech attitudes can give you a clear idea of your effectiveness. A significant portion of most political-campaign budgets goes toward evaluating how a candidate is received by his or her constituents. Politicians want to know what portions of their messages are acceptable to their audiences so they can use this information in the future.

If your objective was to teach your audience about some new idea, a posttest can assess whether you expressed your ideas clearly. In fact, classroom exams are posttests that determine whether your instructor presented information clearly.

## BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES

If the purpose of your speech was to persuade your listeners to do something, you will want to learn whether they ultimately behave as you intended. If you wanted them to vote in an upcoming election, you might survey your listeners to find out how many did vote. If you wanted to win support for a particular cause or organization, you might ask them to sign a petition after your speech. The number of signatures would be a clear measure of your speech’s success. Some religious speakers judge the success of their ministry by the amount of contributions they receive. Your listeners’ actions are the best indicators of your speaking success.

## In Summary

- It is important to become an audience-centered speaker.
- To be an effective speaker, learn as much as you can about your listeners before, during, and after your speech.
- Before your speech, you can perform three kinds of analysis: demographic, psychological, and situational. You can use informal and formal approaches to gather information about your listeners for your analyses.
- While speaking, look for feedback from your listeners. Audience eye contact, facial expression, movement, and general verbal and nonverbal responsiveness provide clues to how well you are doing.
- Evaluate audience reaction after your speech. Nonverbal clues as well as verbal ones will help you judge your speaking skill.
- The best indicator of your speaking success is whether your audience is actually able or willing to follow your advice or remembers what you have told them.

## Key Terms

attitude (p. 000)  
 audience adaptation (p. 000)  
 audience analysis (p. 000)  
 belief (p. 000)  
 closed-ended questions (p. 000)  
 credibility (p. 000)  
 culture (p. 000)  
 demographic audience analysis (p. 000)  
 demographics (p. 000)  
 ethnicity (p. 000)

ethnocentrism (p. 000)  
 gender (p. 000)  
 open-ended questions (p. 000)  
 psychological audience analysis (p. 000)  
 race (p. 000)  
 sex (p. 000)  
 situational audience analysis (p. 000)  
 socioeconomic status (p. 000)  
 target audience (p. 000)  
 value (p. 000)