

Audience Analysis:

Why do we need to analyze an audience? Speaking directly to an audience creates effective communication. How can we speak directly to any audience if we do not understand who they are? Understanding the audience will aid you in:

- topic focus
- delivery
- language usage
- organization
- creation of the introduction and conclusion
- selection of supporting materials
- proof selection

So as you can see, you need to analyze your audience before you can do anything in the creation of your speech. The more homogeneous (same) the people in your audience, the easier it is to speak to them. The more heterogeneous (different) the people in your audience, the more difficult your job will be.

For example, I was asked to speak at the Multnomah County Library about Nonverbal Communication. I knew the audience would be rather heterogeneous; I knew there would be a wide range of ages and experiences in the audience and so I thought I was prepared. When I arrived at the library, I saw the audience consisted of some people who were in their 80's and a few toddlers running around - and everything inbetween. While I had thought I was prepared for this specific audience, I was not. I had to - on the spot - change my entire presentation in order to accommodate the major differences in ages and experiences. If you analyze your audience well enough, this should not happen to you. **Remember, the object of a presentation is not to show off your knowledge, but to allow the audience to listen to your information. Never forget the #1 sin of any speaker.**

While it is impossible to know everything about everyone in your audience, there are a few basic demographics that will help you speak more directly to this specific audience:

Age: the closer to each other in age, the easier it is to speak to the audience. We all have had different experiences simply based on our age. I often do presentations about Issues of People with Disabilities at a local elementary school as well as at a local university. The topic is the same; the language and depth is different. When I do these presentations, I enter using a wheelchair and I bring up different issues for people with a mobility impairment. About half way through the presentation, I want to get out of the wheelchair so we can discuss our perceptual changes, but I can't just stand up. I might make the adult audience hostile for fooling them, and I don't want the kindergarteners to think everyone who uses a wheelchair can stand up. For the adults, I simply tell them I did this for them to be more aware of their own perceptions of me when they thought I was disabled. But this would not work for the five-year-olds. For them I ask if they have ever played "pretend" (and I get some wonderful answers like, "Yes!! This morning I pretended I never hit my brother!!"). Can you imagine how you, as a adult college student, would feel if I asked you if you have ever played "pretend"? We change the language based on the age of the audience.

Gender: we need to be aware of possible differences in experiences and interests based on gender. Understand the general gender makeup of your audience and speak directly to that audience. The focus of your topic, the supporting materials and language usage may be different in order to speak directly to this audience. For example, if your topic is auto repair and

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your audience is predominantly female, you may need to shift the focus. Find examples everyone can relate to, support your ideas with things that are not foreign to any specific gender. I once had a student give a speech on how to put on make-up to an audience which was predominantly male. Although she tried to include them in the introduction, there was no possible reason (except for the occasional cross-dresser or transvestite...) the men in the audience would care HOW this is done.

Social economic status: there is a difference in how people who have money think than those who have none. When I was a student raising my two sons as a single parent, my yearly income was about \$7000 (and yes, we already had electricity and running water here in Portland at that time). This was the same time Johnny Carson was divorcing yet another wife. I remember reading that Joanna Carson had said she could not live on less than \$30,000 a MONTH. Doing a quick math, I had difficulty understanding how I could live for a whole year on 1/3 of her monthly income needs.

The late Michael Stoops, a Portland advocate for the homeless, had the ability to understand the economic differences between the rich and the not rich. He could successfully give a presentation about the homeless to people belonging to the Multnomah Athletic Club as well as to the homeless themselves. Same topic; different approach. He had to first get the people at the MAC to see that they too could easily fall into a situation that might put them homeless.

Race/Ethnicity: this information will give you insight into the audience's value and belief systems. It will help you understand how you can focus on the audience's needs rather than your own. You must avoid racial or ethnic antagonism. Think of James Watt, the Secretary for Defense in the Reagan Administration. He was constantly telling racial jokes and when people told him they were offensive, his reply was, "They know I am joking!" Not so. The audience does not have an insight to your head. You may remember his final "joke" that caused his downfall: "On this committee we have two Jews, a Black, two women, and a cripple....And some of them can even think!" Ha ha ha.....not.

I had a student once who gave a demonstration speech on how to play the harp. While she was not Jewish, she often played at many Jewish functions and had many friends who were Jewish. During the speech, she used a derogatory word for "Jew," which offended many of the audience members. When we brought it up after the presentation, her reply was, "But that is how my friends and I talk to each other!" I had to remind her that we were not her friends, but her audience.

Religion: this is the most difficult to determine in your audience, so it is important to realize there is a whole spectrum of religious beliefs, from Christian to Hindu to atheism. Understanding this will allow you to use a wide variety of proofs and supporting materials, not just assuming your audience believes as you believe.

There was once a Baptist minister, who's church had burned down. The local Rabbi offered his synagogue for the minister to use on Sundays until a new church was built. The minister thanked the Rabbi profusely, saying, "That is very Christian of you!"

Other aspects: such things as location, room size, political views, expectations are also important, but less easy to see and while you may not know this information, you need to keep it in mind as you prepare your speech. Each one will change the language usage, the supporting materials and the use of proofs. Size of audience for example will determine how you deliver the message. The smaller the audience, the less formal you need to be in order to talk directly to the audience. The larger the audience, and the more technology you use to present the speech

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(i.e., sound system, overhead projector, computer generated graphics), the more formal the speech tends to be delivered.

Okay...you have analyzed your audience and now you are ready to go.....nope. You have to select your topic and the specific purpose of that topic.