

Age

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about a particular audience characteristic. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Age Is an Important Audience Characteristic
2. Generations
3. Generation Gaps and Trends

1. Age Is an Important Audience Characteristic

Age is an important variable to consider when analyzing your target audience. Individuals who grow up at the same time are called cultural generations. They often share many of the same experiences as others of the same age group.

An outcome of a cultural generation is a set of shared values, beliefs, and attitudes that are important to consider when preparing a speech.

All four of the women in the figure are from different generations and will have had different experiences. Of which generation do you think they are a member? To which generation do you belong?



TERM TO KNOW

Generation

Cohorts of people who were born in the same date range and share similar cultural experience.

2. Generations

Consider the generations living today and some of their associated characteristics:

The Baby Boom generation were born after World War II, from 1946 to 1964. In general, baby boomers are associated with a rejection or redefinition of traditional values. Boomers tended to think of themselves as a special generation, very different from those that had come before them.

Generation X is the generation defined as those born after the baby boom ended, from 1965 to 1981. Change is more the rule for the people of Generation X than the exception. Unlike their parents, who challenged leaders with an intent to replace them, Gen Xers tend to ignore leaders and work for more long-term institutional and systematic change through economic, media, and consumer actions

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, describes the generation following Generation X, from 1981 to 1999. One segment of this age group has often been called the "eighties babies" generation. Millennials are generally marked by an increased use and familiarity with communication, media, and digital technologies. In most parts of the world its upbringing was marked by an increase in a neoliberal approach to politics and economics.

Generation Z, also known as "Digital Natives," is a term that reflects the pluralistic and fragmented society of those with birth dates between 1997 and 2012. Generation Z is highly connected, as many members of this generation have had lifelong use of communications and media technologies. No longer limited to the home computer, the Internet is now increasingly carried in their pockets on mobile Internet devices.

Generation AO, the Always-On Generation (or Gen AO), describes people born between the early 2000s and the 2020s whose lives have been influenced by connectivity and easy access to people and knowledge through the Internet. They are nimble, quick-acting multi-taskers who count on the Internet as their external brain. Experts predict Gen AO will exhibit a thirst for instant gratification and quick fixes, a loss of patience, and a lack of deep-thinking ability.

3. Generation Gaps and Trends

When you speak to an audience with members of different ages, you are likely to experience a generation gap. Each generation sets its own trends and has its own cultural impact.

Language use: Generations can be distinguished by the differences in their language use. The generation gap has created a parallel gap in language that can be difficult to communicate across. As new generations seek to define themselves as something apart from the old, they adopt new lingo and slang, allowing a generation to create a sense of division from the previous one.

Slang: Slang is an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group or society at large. As each successive generation of society struggles to establish its own unique identity among its predecessors, generational gaps provide a large influence over the continual change and adaptation of slang.

Technological influences: Every generation develops new slang, but with the development of technology, understanding gaps have widened between the older and younger generations. The term "communication skills," for example, might mean formal writing and speaking abilities to an older worker. But it might mean e-mail and instant messaging to a 20-something. Cell phones, texting, tweeting and the like have encouraged younger users to create their own inventive, quirky, and very private written language. They are more connected than ever, but also far more independent.



HINT

Regardless of which generation you are from, it is important to become aware of one's own biases in order to avoid **ageism** in your speeches.



TERM TO KNOW

Ageism

Ageism, or age discrimination is stereotyping and discriminating against individuals or groups because of their age. It is a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values used to justify age based prejudice, discrimination, and subordination.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **age is an important audience characteristic** because individuals who grow up at the same time are considered a **generation** and often share many of the same experiences as others of the same age group. They exhibit a set of shared values, beliefs, and attitudes that are important to consider when preparing a speech. When you speak to an audience with members of different ages, you are likely to experience a **generation gap**. As new generations

seek to define themselves as something apart from the old, they adopt new lingo and slang, allowing a generation to create a sense of division from the previous one. The use of handheld communications technology has created a wide gap between older and younger generations.

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