

# Common Issues in Professional Presentations

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about some obstacles you'll need to address in order to make your content as accessible to your audience as possible. Specifically this lesson will cover:

## 1. Language

Language serves both to bring us together and to help us reinforce our group status. Language can include established languages, like Spanish or French, dialects, or even subtle in-group language styles within a larger language context.



### THINK ABOUT IT

Have you ever been part of a group that has its own words or phrases, expressions that have meanings understood only by the members of your group? It is not unusual for families, groups of close friends, classmates, and romantic couples to develop these kinds of "private language."

When a group communicates in its own way, it can create a sense of belonging, reinforcing your membership and place in that group. People often tell each other stories, which often communicate a value or meaning in the culture. Diverse cultures have diverse sayings that reflect differences in values, customs, and traditions.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Perhaps you have heard the saying, "The early bird gets the worm," with its underlying meaning that the one who is prepared and ready gets the reward. In North America, this saying is common, and reflects a cultural value about promptness and competition.

As you learned in a previous lesson, some types of language can bring us together because they involve a specialized knowledge unique to the group or community; however, they can create barriers to outsiders for that same reason. Strong **self and social awareness skills** can help you recognize when you may be leaving out a group or individual by using too much of these types of language.

**Jargon** is an occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Think of the way medical caregivers speak to one another, frequently using abbreviations for procedures and medications.

**Slang** is the use of existing or newly invented words to take the place of standard or traditional words with the intent of adding an unconventional, nonstandard, humorous, or rebellious effect.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Think of how the words "cool," "glitzy," or "scam" are used in casual conversation. Jargon and slang are often called co-languages, because they exist and interact with a dominant language but are nonetheless distinct from it.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Jargon**

Occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession.

##### **Slang**

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## 2. Cultural Perceptions

Perception is an important part of the communication process, and it is important to recognize that other people's perceptions may be different from our own in several ways.

Your cultural value system, what you value and pay attention to, will significantly affect your speech and how your listeners perceive it. Learning about other cultures can help you adapt your speech in diverse settings, and make you more comfortable as you enter new situations where others' perceptions are different from your own.

There are several different facets of cultural perception that impact how we communicate. As we examine these, we must be careful to recognize that individual members of the culture may hold beliefs or customs that do not follow a cultural norm. In other words, these norms are useful to keep in mind, but they do not hold true for everyone within a certain culture.

### 2a. Roles

Role identities, which involve expected social behavior, are another aspect of intercultural communication that can act as a barrier to effective communication.

➞ **EXAMPLE** How does your culture expect men and women to act and behave? How about children and older citizens? The word "role" implies an expectation of how one is supposed to act in certain settings and scenes; just like in a play or a movie, each person has a culturally bound set of role expectations. Who works as a doctor, a lawyer, a nurse, or a welder?

As times and cultures change, so do role identities.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Business and management were once perceived as fields dominated by men, but in recent decades, women have become actively involved in starting, developing, and facilitating the growth of businesses.

As a speaker, your role will necessarily involve preparation and practice, and to a degree, an element of leadership as you present your content and guide your audience through it. Your audience also has a role, which involves active listening and displays of interest. Your overlapping roles of interest in the topic are keys to an effective speech.

### 2b. Worldviews

Social psychologist Geert Hofstede has spent decades researching the concepts of individualism and

collectivism across diverse cultures. He characterized U.S. culture as strongly individualistic: People perceive things primarily from their own viewpoint, see themselves as individuals capable of making their own decisions, and feel responsible for their actions and solving their own problems.

He also found many countries in Asia and South America to be much more collectivistic, focusing on the needs of the family, community, or larger group. In this context, cultural background can become a barrier to an effective speech if you fail to consider your audience and their needs.

In addition, researcher Carley Dodd has investigated the degree to which cultures communicate rules explicitly or implicitly. In an explicit context, the rules are discussed before we hold a meeting, negotiate a contract, or even play a game.

➞ **EXAMPLE** In the United States, we want to make sure everyone knows the rules beforehand and get frustrated if people do not follow the rules. In the Middle East and Latin America, the rules are generally understood by everyone, and people from these cultures tend to be more accommodating to small differences and are less concerned about whether or not everyone plays by the same rules.

In turn, our ability to adapt to contexts that are explicit or implicit is related to our ability to tolerate uncertainty.

➞ **EXAMPLE** In the United States, we often look to guiding principles rather than rules for every circumstance, and believe that with hard work, we can achieve our goals even though we do not know the outcome. In some other cultures, however, people prefer to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty, and like to know exactly what is expected and what the probable outcome will be.

## 2c. Ethnocentrism

Gaining experience communicating with people from other cultures may help you to not view the world and its diversity of cultures in an ethnocentric way.

**Ethnocentrism** involves going beyond pride in your culture, heritage, or background. It is a sense of superiority of one's own group over others, and it can influence individual and group behavior.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If you visit a new country where people do things differently, you would be considered ethnocentric if you viewed their way as wrong because it is not the same way you were taught. Groups are considered ethnocentric if they prejudge individuals or other groups of people based on negative preconceptions.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Ethnocentrism**

The view of other cultures through the lens of one's own culture; the belief that one's culture is a dominant or superior culture.



### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about aspects of communication that you will need to consider when preparing a speech or presentation. **Language** choices can function to make an audience feel included and therefore receptive, or excluded and therefore hostile or disinterested.

**Cultural perceptions** must also be considered. Reflecting on your audience's perspective on **roles** and

**worldview** and checking your personal **ethnocentrism** are important for building a successful relationship with an audience that supports effective communication. These are common issues in professional presentations that can be diminished with strong self and social awareness.

Best of luck in your learning!

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