

Culture

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the connection between culture and public speaking. Specifically, this lesson will focus on:

1. Keeping an Open Mind to Cultural Differences

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What defines **culture**? Culture certainly includes race, nationality, and ethnicity, but it goes beyond those identity markers as well. When we talk about culture, we are referring to belief systems, values, and behaviors that support a particular ideology or social arrangement.

The following are various aspects of our individual identity that we use to create membership in a shared cultural identity:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Nationality
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Class

Culture guides language use, appropriate forms of dress, and views of the world. The concept is broad and encompasses many areas of society such as the role of the family, the role of the individual, educational systems, employment, and gender.

Different cultures have different modes and patterns of communication that can hinder effective listening if the listener is either unfamiliar with the speaker's patterns or holds a mistaken view about them. These kinds of cultural differences include speakers' accents and vocabulary, as well as assumptions about shared information and the roles of listeners and speakers in conversation.

In a broad sense, we all grow up immersed in various cultures all at once - family, country, region, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic class, etc. - and sometimes the specifics of those cultures seem to be hard-wired into our thinking and the ways in which we communicate. Without meaning to, we may bring assumptions or judgments into a conversation that don't actually align with the thoughts or beliefs of our

conversational partner, and this can create a barrier to effective communication.

Effective communicators understand that they grow up with cultural biases for and against certain modes of communication. Because of this, an open-minded listener will work hard to focus on what the speaker is actually saying regardless of how they're saying it. Cultural filters and frameworks may be useful later in an analysis of what someone said, but the starting point of effective listening should be to understand the perspective of the speaker as fully as possible.

Maintaining this kind of cultural sensitivity requires some basics of open-minded listening: suspending judgment and employing empathy whenever possible. By meeting the speaker on his or her own grounds and taking care to focus on the content rather than the style of the communication, we can best assure more effective understanding.



TERM TO KNOW

Culture

The arts, customs, and habits that characterize a particular society or nation; the beliefs, values, behavior, and material objects that constitute a people's way of life.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that cultural differences can include speakers' accents, vocabulary, and assumptions about shared information or the roles of listeners and speakers in conversation. Effective communicators understand that they grow up with cultural biases for and against certain modes of communication. Suspending judgments, exercising empathy, and focusing on content rather than style can help you **keep an open mind to cultural differences** overcome cultural barriers to effective communication.

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