

Establishing Credibility

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn why it's important to be perceived as credible by your audience. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Establishing Credibility
2. Self-Presentation
3. Establishing Authority
4. Gaining Credibility with a Skeptical Audience

1. Establishing Credibility

In the realm of public speaking, the message is inseparable from the messenger. If audiences don't trust you, they won't listen to you.

Unfortunately, their trust is based on superficial, silly, and irrelevant factors in addition to legitimate concerns. First impressions are hard to overcome, and audiences will begin judging you before you even have a chance to introduce yourself.

Preparing a good speech is not enough to gain the audience's trust and respect— you also have to prepare *yourself*. Establishing **credibility** may seem like a daunting task. After all, different people are looking for different things. How could you possibly please them all?

Fortunately, public speakers can rely on a set of general guidelines to establish credibility in a variety of situations.



TERM TO KNOW

Credibility

The objective and subjective components of the believability of a source or message.

2. Self-Presentation

Self-presentation is a crucial factor in a public speaker's credibility. The following strategies can help speakers convince their listeners that they deserve trust and respect:

1. Dress the part. Find out how formal the occasion is and style yourself accordingly. Keep it simple: loud patterns, bright colors, flashy jewelry, and revealing styles may distract the audience from your message. When in doubt, err on the side of formal professional attire.
 2. Look at the audience. Speakers who make eye contact with the audience appear more open, trustworthy, and confident. Even if you are reading from a script or consulting cue cards, look up frequently to maintain your connection with the audience.
 3. Speak loudly, clearly, and confidently. Confidence is contagious— if you have confidence, the audience will catch it easily.
 4. State your credentials. Trust is contagious too--audiences will trust you more readily if you can prove that other people value your expertise. Credentials include relevant degrees, certifications, testimonials, recommendations, work experience, volunteering experience, and informally, other types of personal experience.
 5. Reveal a personal connection to your topic. What is at stake for you? How has the subject affected your life? If it is appropriate, share a personal anecdote that illustrates your relationship to the topic.
 6. Establish common ground with your audience. What problems do you have in common? What goals do you have in common?
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3. Establishing Authority

Why should the audience listen to anything you have to say? The burden of proof is on you, so you need to make a case for the value of your experience, training, or research.

Tell the audience how you became an authority on your topic. Don't expect anyone to simply take your word for it, though: bring in outside sources to boost your credibility. Demonstrate that you are familiar with the conversations that surround your topic. Mention or quote other authorities on your topic to show that you are familiar with their contributions.

Also, show your audience that you understand how your topic fits into a larger context. Look at the history of your issue and its treatment in other contexts or cultures. Winston Churchill's maxim, "The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see," is a great case for the relationship between context and wisdom.



BIG IDEA

State the source of your authority (experience, training, or research), refer to outside authorities, and put your perspective in context.

4. Gaining Credibility with a Skeptical Audience

If you are speaking to a skeptical or hostile audience, begin by finding common ground. Appeal to shared beliefs and values, and identify a goal that you can all agree on. Refer to this shared goal throughout your speech to remind your audience that, ultimately, you want the same thing.

Show skeptics that you are motivated by a sincere desire to find the best answer and that, as a result, you have carefully considered their perspective. You will lose credibility if you dismiss opposing views offhand. If you can demonstrate that you understand why opposing views are attractive, you will have more credibility when you make a case for your own position.

If you fail to address common points of contention, your audience will have a perfect excuse to resist your argument. In sum:

- Find common ground
- Appeal to shared beliefs and values
- Identify a shared goal
- Return to this shared goal throughout the speech
- Demonstrate that you have considered other perspectives on the issue
- Show that you understand the appeal of opposing positions
- Make a case for your position



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that you shouldn't rely on the content of your speech to **gain credibility** with the audience. **Self-presentation** is important too, since the audience will start judging you before you begin speaking. **Establish your authority** to speak about your topic by stating the source of your knowledge: experience, training, or research. When you speak to a **skeptical audiences**, begin by finding common ground. Acknowledge the appeal of opposing perspectives before you make a strong case for your own opinion.

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TERMS TO KNOW

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