

# Hold the Audience's Attention

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn techniques for keeping the audience engaged with your speech.

Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Hold the Audience's Attention
  - a. Readiness to Perceive
  - b. Selection of Certain Stimuli for Focus
  - c. State of Current Awareness

## 1. Hold the Audience's Attention

To hold the attention of the audience, a public speaker should consider three important aspects of the process of **perception**:

- Readiness to perceive
- Selection of certain stimuli for focus of attention
- State of current **awareness**



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Perception

Conscious understanding of something; acuity.

### Awareness

The state or ability to perceive, to feel, or to be conscious of events, objects, or sensory patterns. In this level of consciousness, sense data can be confirmed by an observer without necessarily implying understanding.

### 1a. Readiness to Perceive

The speaker is responsible for setting the stage. The speaker does this with the opening introduction in the the first 25 to 30 sections.

If the speaker can secure the attention of the audience at the very beginning of the speech, he or she can then direct and focus that attention to the important parts of the message, as follows:

1. Make sure that the room is free of noise and other distractions, to ensure that the audience is focused on

the speech, rather than what is happening in the room.

2. Speakers are often introduced by a host. This brief introduction is important because it helps to establish the speaker's credentials and prepares the audience members so their attention is properly directed.

3. Remember that the first important function of the introduction is to "capture the attention of the audience" and then immediately direct attention to the speech's main message.

### **1b. Selection of Certain Stimuli for Focus**

While delivering the speech, the speaker wants the audience to concentrate on his or her message, and directs their attention to what is important through the use of voice, body, and gesture.

This is done by emphasizing the important points by changing the rate, volume, or pitch of the voice. Using vocal variety purposely helps the audience know what is important and directs their attention to those elements.

In addition, the speaker's body and gestures can direct attention to important aspects of the message (for example, by pointing to, walking to, or touching a visual aid or diagram).

Additional examples include the following:

1. To understand where he or she wants the audience to direct their attention, the speaker can consider a quick internal summary of an idea.
2. Use signposts, such as "Now get this..." or "Here is the important point, which I want you to remember."
3. When using a visual aid, use additional audio cues or color changes to highlight specific areas.

### **1c. State of Current Awareness**

Speakers must read the non-verbal clues of the audience to understand if they have shifted their focus somewhere else.

If the audience members are glancing at their watches, texting, or glancing at other people in the audience, the speaker should recognize the current state and redirect the attention back to the speech's message.

To change the current state of the audience's awareness and re-gain their attention, try the following:

1. Challenge the audience with an inquiry to stimulating thinking. Ask for a show of hands to vote or to give answers, use clickers or an audience response system to get a response and then share the result, or ask a relevant question to stimulate thought.
2. Engage in narrative as a change of pace from message delivery. Create a narrative that is relevant to the topic and is dramatic for the audience, and use a surprise ending to direct the audience attention to the message.
3. Provide concrete examples of a concept or main point that is directly relevant and engaging for the audience. Make a comparison to something that has recently happened in the community or nationally.
4. Stimulate the audience's imagination or take them on a fantasy journey that stimulates the different senses. The more the senses are stimulated, the more the current focus is on the speech's message.



## BIG IDEA

There are many strategies that the speaker can employ to hold the attention of the audience, but the most important is the ability to establish and maintain a genuine connection with the people in your audience. Speakers don't need to use a choke-hold to keep the audience's attention.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned several methods for **holding the audience's attention**. If the speaker can **establish readiness** by getting the audience's attention during the first 25-30 seconds of the speech, he or she can then direct and focus that attention to the important parts of the message. The speaker can **select certain stimuli for focus** by using changes in rate and volume, body movement, and gesture to emphasize what is important. If the audience's attention is shifting from the speech, the speaker can change the **state of current awareness** with an inquiry to stimulate thinking. While there are many strategies to employ to hold the attention of the audience, the most important is the ability to establish and maintain a genuine connection with the people in the audience.

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