

# Maximize Understanding

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to facilitate understanding among your audience. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. The Elements of Understanding
2. Applying Prior Knowledge about the Audience
3. Applying General Strategies

## 1. The Elements of Understanding

**Understanding** involves comprehending or knowing about an object, idea, concept, or process. In essence, you want the audience to comprehend and share the same understanding.

It would be a very simple process if you could just exchange memory modules for your audience to upload, but we are not there yet. Today, you will use words to explain your thoughts.

Here we are concerned with how you might use different rhetorical strategies to maximize what the audience understands.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Understanding

The mental (sometimes emotional) process of comprehension, or the assimilation of knowledge, which is subjective by its nature.

## 2. Applying Prior Knowledge about the Audience

Apply what you already know about the demographics, background, and life experiences of the audience. Ask yourself, "What does my audience already understand or know?"

You can apply the knowledge to maximize understanding.

Language choice and vocabulary: You'll want to begin your explanation at the right level; ask yourself, "What vocabulary will my audience understand and what do I need to explain before I can explain other concepts?"

Compare and contrast based upon shared knowledge: When you are showing how two things are alike, create connections with what the audience already knows. In order to maximize understanding, you'll want to compare those things that are already familiar against the new and unfamiliar things. Then, you can demonstrate how they are the same or different.

Visualize transformation by cause and origin: Where did something come from and how did it get to its present state or condition? Help the audience picture the change from one state or condition to another.

Classification and grouping alike things to form a concept: First, you'll want to cite examples that are familiar to the audience and put them into the same **classification**. Then you can put other less familiar objects or ideas into the same class or grouping while using the same label. You can even help the audience generalize to create a classification.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Let's say you see a fir, a willow, and a linden. By comparing these objects, you notice that they are different from one another in respect to the trunk, branches, leaves, and the like; a further **comparison**, however, reveals what they have in common: the trunk, branches, and leaves themselves, which form the abstraction from their size, shape, and so forth. Thus, you gain a concept of a tree.

Sequence and origin: Here you help the audience understand the process or sequence of events in time. You can clearly list and number the steps or events in the order in which they occur. In addition to using sequencing words, you can also use simple mnemonics, like the knuckle mnemonic, which helps the listeners sequence things such as how many days are in each month .



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Classification

The act of forming into a class or classes; a distribution into groups, as classes, orders, families, etc., according to some common relations or attributes.

##### Comparison

An evaluation of the similarities and differences of one or more things relative to each other.

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## 3. Applying General Strategies

Perspective-taking: Practice perspective-taking so you can frame and reframe your examples in a way that the audience members will understand. You'll want to see how the members of the audience organize the world cognitively in order to reframe your concepts so that the audience understands them. If your initial explanation is not effective with a particular audience, you may reframe and refocus on different aspects of what you are explaining.

Repetition: Build upon prior understanding of concepts by repeating and using internal summaries. This ensures the audience does not miss an important idea that is critical to understanding the whole message.

Questioning: Question your audience to see if they understand what you are saying, and adjust your explanation in order to clarify misunderstandings.

Paraphrase: Paraphrase what you said for the audience and restate the ideas using different examples. Different audience members may not understand one idea but may understand another that relates more

directly to their prior knowledge.



## BIG IDEA

Simply put, you'll want to learn how the audience conceptualizes the world and then use that knowledge to maximize understanding. Use your skills of restating, questioning, perspective-taking, and paraphrasing to help clarify and reinforce understanding as you speak.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **the elements of understanding** involve the use of words applied in various rhetorical strategies to exchange understandings. You can **apply prior knowledge of the audience** to choose the right vocabulary, to make comparisons with things familiar to them, to show the origin of things, to group things into categories meaningful to them, and to number the steps or events in the order that they occur. To increase understanding during a speech, you can **apply general strategies** such as taking the perspective of the audience to restate ideas, asking the audience questions, and paraphrasing what you have just said using different examples and choice of words.

Source: Boundless. "Maximize Understanding." Boundless Communications Boundless, 26 May. 2016. Retrieved 3 Jun. 2017 from <https://www.boundless.com/communications/textbooks/boundless-communications-textbook/learning-to-listen-and-helping-others-do-the-same-5/helping-your-audience-listen-more-33/maximize-understanding-147-4171/>



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