

# The Benefits of Understanding your Audience

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the importance of getting to know your audience. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Benefits of Understanding Audiences
2. Audience-Centered Approach to Speaking
3. Finding Common Ground by Taking Perspective
4. Gathering and Interpreting Information
5. Practical Benefits for the Speaker

## 1. Benefits of Understanding Audiences

When you are speaking, you want listeners to understand and respond favorably to what you are saying. An **audience** is one or more people who come together to listen to the speaker.

Audience members may be face-to-face with the speaker or they may be connected by communication technology such as computers or other media. The audience may be small and private or it may be large and public.

A key characteristic of public speaking situations is the unequal distribution of speaking time between speaker and audience. As an example, the speaker usually talks more while the audience listens, often without asking questions or responding with any feedback. In some situations, the audience may ask questions or respond overtly by clapping or making comments.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Audience**

One or more people within hearing range of some message; for example, a group of people listening to a performance, speech etc.; the crowd attending a stage performance.

## 2. Audience-Centered Approach to Speaking

Since there is usually limited communication between the speaker and the audience, there is limited opportunity to go back to explain your meaning either during the speech or afterward.

When planning a speech, it is important to know about the audience and to adapt the message to the audience. You want to prepare an **audience-centered** speech, or a speech with a focus on the audience.

In public speaking, you are speaking to and for your audience; thus, understanding the audience is a major part of the speech-making process. In audience-centered speaking, getting to know your target audience is one of the most important tasks that you face. You want to learn about the major demographics of the audience, such as general age, gender, education, religion, and culture, as well as to what groups the audience members belong.

Additionally, learning about the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the members of your audience will allow you to anticipate and plan your message.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### **Audience-Centered**

Audience-centered contrasts with speaker-centered. When preparing a message the source analyzes the audience in order to adapt the content and language usage to the level of the listeners.

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## 3. Finding Common Ground by Taking Perspective

You want to analyze your audience prior to your speech so that during the speech you can create a link between you, the speaker, and the audience.

You want to be able to figuratively step inside the minds of audience members to understand the world from their perspectives.

Through this process, you can find common ground with your audience, which allows you to align your message with what the audience already knows or believes.

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## 4. Gathering and Interpreting Information

**Audience analysis** involves gathering and interpreting information about the recipients of oral, written, or visual communication. There are very simple methods for conducting an audience analysis, such as interviewing a small group about its knowledge or attitudes or using more involved methods of analyzing demographic studies of relevant segments of the population.

You may also find it useful to look at sociological studies of different age groups or cultural groups. You might also use a questionnaire or rating scale to collect data about the basic demographic information and opinions of your target audience.

These examples do not form an all-inclusive list of methods to analyze your audience, but they can help you

obtain a general understanding of how you can learn about your audience.

After considering all the known factors, a profile of the intended audience can be created, allowing you to speak in a manner that is understood by the intended audience.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Audience Analysis

An audience analysis involves the study of the pertinent elements defining the makeup and characteristics of your audience.

## 5. Practical Benefits for the Speaker

Understanding who makes up your target audience will allow you to carefully plan your message and adapt what you say to the level of understanding and background of the listeners.

Two practical benefits of conducting an audience analysis are:

- To prevent you from saying the wrong thing, such as telling a joke which offends
- To help you speak to your audience in a language they understand about things that interest them

Your speech will be more successful if you can create a message that informs and engages your audience.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the **benefits of understanding audiences**, including the **practical benefits for you as a speaker**. Knowing characteristics of your audience - such as general age, gender, education level, religion, language, culture, and group membership - is the single most important aspect of developing your speech when taking an **audience-centered approach**. **Gathering and interpreting information** through audience analysis can uncover information that may help you **find common ground** with your audience.

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