

# audience analysis

## chapter 5

By Peter DeCaro, Ph.D. Tyrone Adams, Ph.D. Bonnie Jefferis, Ph.D.  
University of Alaska - St. Petersburg College  
Fairbanks Lafayette

### introduction

*Robert E. Mullins, a well-known local bank officer, was preparing a speech for the Rotary Club in Dallas, Texas on the topic of “finding the right loan” for a rather diverse audience. He knew his topic extremely well, had put a lot of hard work into his research, and had his visual aids completely in order. One of the things he had not fully considered, however, was the audience to which he would be speaking. On the day of the presentation, Mr. Mullins delivered a flawless speech on “secured” car and home loans, but the speech was not received particularly well. You see, on this particular week, a major segment of the audience consisted of the “Junior Rotarians” who wanted to hear about “personal savings accounts” and “college savings plans.” It was a critical error. Had Mr. Mullins considered the full nature and demographic makeup of his audience prior to the event, he might not have been received so poorly.*

In contemporary public speaking, the audience that you are addressing is the entire reason you are giving the speech; accordingly, the audience is therefore the most important component of all speechmaking. It cannot be said often or more forcefully enough: know your audience! Knowing your audience—their beliefs, attitudes, age, education level, job functions, language, and culture—is the single most important aspect of developing your speech strategy and execution plan. Your audience isn't just a passive group of people who come together by happenstance to listen to you. Your

audience is assembled for a very real and significant reason: they want to hear what you have to say. So, be prepared.

---

*Spectacular achievement is always preceded by unspectacular preparation.*

*~ Robert H. Schuller*



### chapter objectives

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

1. List techniques for analyzing a specific target audience.
2. Explain audience analysis by direct observation.
3. Describe audience analysis by inference.
4. Identify the purpose of a basic questionnaire.
5. Recognize and apply data sampling.
6. Determine when to use a Likert-type test.
7. Define the five categories of audience analysis.
8. Summarize the purpose of the situational analysis.
9. Explain audience analysis by demography.
10. Recognize the difference between beliefs, attitudes and values.
11. Identify reasons for sampling a multicultural audience.
12. Apply the chapter concepts in final questions and activities.

### chapter outline

- Introduction
- Approaches to Audience Analysis
  - Direct Observation
  - Inference
  - Sampling
- Categories of Audience Analysis
  - Situational Analysis
  - Demographic Analysis
  - Psychological Analysis
  - Multicultural Analysis
  - Interest and Knowledge Analysis
- Conclusion
- Review Questions and Activities
- Glossary
- References

We analyze our audience because we want to discover information that will help create a bond between the speaker and the audience. We call this bond “identification.” Aristotle loosely called it “finding a common ground.” This isn't a one-way process between the speaker and the audience; rather, it is a two-way transactional process. When you ask an audience to listen to your ideas, you are inviting them to come partway into your personal and professional experience as an expert speaker. And, in return, it is your responsibility and obligation to go partway into their experience as an audience. The more you know and understand about your audience and their psychological needs, the better you can prepare your speech and your enhanced confidence will reduce your own speaker anxiety (Dwyer, 2005).

This chapter is dedicated to understanding how a speaker connects with an audience through **audience analysis** by direct observation, analysis by inference, and data collection (Clevenger, 1966). In addition, this chapter explores the five categories of audience analysis: (1) the situational analysis, (2) the demographic analysis, (3) the psychological analysis, (4) the multicultural analysis, and (5) the topic interest and prior knowledge analysis.

### approaches to audience analysis

Whenever thinking about your speech, it is always a good idea to begin with a thorough awareness of your audience and the many factors comprising that particular audience. In speech communication, we simply call this “doing an audience analysis.” An audience analysis is when you consider all of the pertinent elements defining the makeup and **demographic characteristics** (also known as **demographics**) of your audience (McQuail, 1997). From the Greek prefix *demo* (of the people), we come to understand that there are detailed accounts of human population characteristics, such as age, gender, education, occupation, language, ethnicity, culture, background knowledge, needs and interests, and previously held attitudes, beliefs, and values. Demographics are widely used by advertising and public relations professionals to analyze specific audiences so that their products or ideas will carry influence. However, all good public speakers consider the demographic characteristics of their audience, as well. It is the fundamental stage of preparing for your speech. Table 5.1 shows some examples of demographics and how they may be used when developing your speech. Of course, this is not an all-inclusive list. But, it does help you get a good general understanding of the demographics of the audience you will be addressing.

So now you may be saying to yourself: “Gee, that’s great! How do I go about analyzing my particular

Demographic Characteristics	Do’s and Don’ts
Ethnicity	Don’t try to use words or phrases to “cuddle up” to one race or another. You would lose some credibility if you made a point in your speech and then said, “So get jiggy with it” or “You could enjoy that with your afternoon tea ceremony” (Pearson, et al, 2011).
Age	Stay away from jargon from one age range or another, like “OMG” or “the cat’s pajamas” (Gamble & Gamble, 2013).
Sex/Gender	Use words that are not sex/gender-specific. Instead of policeman, fireman, and stewardess, use police officer, firefighter, and flight attendant. Do not use one-sex/gender pronouns, like assuming a teacher is a “she” and a dentist is a “he” (Eisenberg & Wynn, 2013).
Income	Some people in your audience will have more money than others. So if you keep fit by maintaining membership in a prominent gym and you take classes there also, don’t assume everyone else can afford to do so. You can tell your audience what you do, but give them options like parking far from the store and working out with a yoga or Pilates CD at home.
Occupation	Unless you are speaking at a convention where everyone in your audience works in the same field, make your speech more explanatory. Your audience has not had extensive training in medical terms nor legal terms. So you need to explain what you are talking about, without using the big words which would make your audience feel confused, stupid, and put down.
Religion	Realize that your audience will likely have a wide variety of religions represented, and some people may have no religious or spiritual beliefs. So you can say that YOU read the Bible every night for 10 minutes, but that you are suggesting that everyone choose a religious or inspirational reading for pre-sleep relaxation (Gamble & Gamble, 2013).
Education Level	Even if you are speaking to an audience of college freshman, not everyone has had the same educational experiences. For example, some of the people in your class may have completed a high school equivalency program like the GED, some may be high school students who are taking a college class, some may have gone to secondary school in another country, some may be home-schooled, and some may have gone to a private honors-based prep school. You need to be careful not to talk down to your audience and not to use fancy sentences and words to try to impress your audience. Gauging the right level of communication for your speech is an important challenge.

audience?” First, you need to know that there are three overarching methods (or “**paradigms**”) for doing an audience analysis: audience analysis by direct observation, audience analysis by inference, and audience analysis through data collection. Once you get

to know how these methods work, you should be able to select which one (or even combination of these methods) is right for your circumstances.

---

*Nothing has such power to broaden the mind as the ability to investigate systematically and truly all that comes under thy observation in life.*

~ Marcus Aurelius

### direct observation

Audience analysis by direct observation, or direct experience, is, by far, the most simple of the three paradigms for “getting the feel” of a particular audience. It is a form of qualitative data gathering. We perceive it through one or more of our five natural senses—hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling. Knowledge that we acquire through personal experience has more impact on us than does knowledge that we learn indirectly. Knowledge acquired from personal experience is also more likely to affect our thinking and will be retained for a longer period of time. We are more likely to trust what we hear, see, feel, taste, and smell rather than what we learn from secondary sources of information (Pressat, 1972).

All you really need to do for this method of observation is to examine your audience. If you are lucky enough to be able to do this before speaking to your audience, you will be able to gather some basic reflective data (How old are they? What racial mix does this audience have? Does their non-verbal behavior indicate that they are excited to hear this speech?) that will help you arrange your thoughts and arguments for your speech (Nierenberg & Calero, 1994).

One excellent way to become informed about your audience is to ask them about themselves. In its most basic form, this is data collection. Whenever possible, have conversations with them – interact with members of your audience – get to know them on a personal level (Where did you go to school? Do you have siblings/pets? What kind of car do you drive?) Through these types of conversations, you will be able to get to know and

appreciate each audience member as both a human being and as an audience member. You will come to understand what interests them, convinces them, or even makes them laugh. You might arouse interest and curiosity in your topic while you also gain valuable data.



For example, you want to deliver a persuasive speech about boycotting farm-raised fish. You could conduct a short attitudinal survey to discover what your audience thinks about the topic, if they eat farm-raised fish, and if they believe it is healthy for them. This information will help you when you construct your speech because you will know their attitudes about the subject. You would be able to avoid constructing a speech that potentially could do the opposite of what you intended.

Another example would be that you want to deliver an informative speech about your town’s recreational activities and facilities. Your focus can be aligned with your audience if, before you begin working on your speech, you find out if your audience has senior citizens and/or high school students and/or new parents.

Clearly this cannot be done in every speaking situation, however. Often, we are required to give an **unacquainted-audience presentation**. Unacquainted-audience presentations are speeches when you are completely unfamiliar with the audience and its demographics. In these cases, it is

always best to try and find some time to sit down and talk with someone you trust (or even several people) who might be familiar with the given audience. These conversations can be very constructive in helping you understand the context in which you will be speaking.

Not understanding the basic demographic characteristics of an audience, or further, that audience’s beliefs, values, or attitudes about a given topic makes your presentation goals haphazard, at best. Look around the room at the people who will be listening to your speech. What types of gender, age, ethnicity, and educational-level characteristics are represented? What are their expectations for your presentation? This is all-important information you should know before you begin your research and drafting your outline. Who is it that I am going to be talking to?

---

*If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?*

~ Albert Einstein

### inference

Audience analysis by inference is merely a logical extension of your observations drawn in the method above. It is a form of critical thinking known as inductive reasoning, and another form of qualitative data gathering. An inference is when you make a reasoned tentative conclusion or logical judgment on the basis of available evidence. It is best used when you can identify patterns in your evidence that indicate something is expected to happen again or should hold true based upon previous experiences. A good speaker knows how to interpret information and draw conclusions from that information. As individuals we make inferences—or reasonable assumptions—all the time. For example, when we hear someone speaking Arabic, we infer that they are from the Middle East. When we see this person carrying a copy of The

Koran, we infer that they are also a follower of the Muslim faith. These are reasoned conclusions that we make based upon the evidence available to us and our general knowledge about people and their traits.

When we reason, we make connections, distinctions, and predictions; we use what is known or familiar to us to reach a conclusion about something that is unknown or unfamiliar for it to make sense. Granted, of course, inferences are sometimes wrong. Here's a familiar example: You reach into a jar full of jelly beans, and they turn out to be all black. You love black jelly beans. You reach back into the jar and take another hand full, which turn out to be, again, all black. Since you can't see the jelly beans inside the jar you make an assumption based on empirical evidence (two handfuls of jelly beans) that all of the jelly beans are black. You reach into the jar a third time and take a hand full of jelly beans out, but this time they aren't any black jelly beans, but white, pink, and yellow. Your conclusion that all of the jelly beans were black turned out to be fallacious.

### data sampling

Unlike audience analysis by direct observation and analysis by inference, audience analysis by data sampling uses statistical evidence to quantify and clarify the characteristics of your audience. These characteristics are also



known as variables (Tucker, et al, 1981), and are assigned a numerical value so we can systematically collect and classify them. They are reported as statistics, also known as quantitative analysis or quantitative data collection. Statistics are numerical summaries of facts, figures, and research findings. Audience analysis by data sampling requires you to survey your audience before you give your speech. You need to know the basics of doing a survey before you actually collect and interpret your data.

---

*If you make listening and observation your occupation, you will gain much more than you can by talk.*

~ Robert Baden-Powell

### basic questionnaire

There are a great number of survey methods available to the speaker. However, we will cover three primary types in this section because they are utilized the most. The first type of survey method you should know about is the basic questionnaire, which is a series of questions advanced to produce demographic and attitudinal data from your audience.

Clearly, audience members should not be required to identify themselves by name on the basic questionnaire. Anonymous questionnaires are more likely to produce truthful information. Remember, all you are looking for is a general read of your audience; you should not be looking for specific information about any respondent concerning your questionnaire in particular. It is a bulk sampling tool, only.

While you can easily gather basic demographic data (examples of demographic questions are shown in the chart following this section), we need to adjust our questions a bit more tightly, or ask more focused questions, in order to understand the audience's "predispositions" to think or act in certain ways. For example, you can put an attitudinal extension on the basic

questionnaire (examples of attitudinal questions are shown in Figure 5.1).

These questions probe more deeply into the psyche of your audience members, and will help you see where they stand on certain issues. Of course, you may need to tighten these questions to get to the heart of your specific topic. But, once you do, you'll have a wealth of data at your disposal that, ultimately, will tell you how to work with your target audience.



### ordered categories

Another method of finding out your audience's value set is to survey them according to their value hierarchy. A value hierarchy is a person's *value structure* placed in relationship to a given *value set* (Rokeach, 1968). The way to determine a person's value hierarchy is to use the ordered categories sampling method. Here, each audience member is given a list of values on a piece of paper, and each audience member writes these values on another piece of paper in order according to their importance to him/her. Each response is different, of course, because each audience member is different, but when analyzed by the speaker, common themes will present themselves in the overall data. Accordingly, the speaker can then identify with those common value themes. (Examples of an Ordered Value Set appear in Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Examples of Survey Questions

Demographic Questions	Attitudinal Questions
1. Academic level in college a. freshman b. sophomore c. junior d. senior  2. Marital status: a. single b. married c. divorced d. widowed  3. Age a. less than 18 years old b. 18 – 30 years old c. 31 – 45 years old d. over 46 years of age	1. I regard myself as: a. conservative b. liberal c. socialist d. independent  2. I believe that abortion: a. should be illegal b. should remain legal c. should be legal only in cases of rape d. not sure  3. I think that prayer should be permitted in public schools: a. yes b. no c. undecided
Value Ordered Questions	Likert-type Questions
Place the following list of values in order of importance, from most important (1) to least important (5).  Freedom      Democracy Liberty      Safety Justice  1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____	Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each question.  1. Unsolicited email should be illegal Strongly Agree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly Disagree  2. Making unsolicited email illegal would be fundamentally unfair to businesses. Strongly Agree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly Disagree  3. I usually delete unsolicited email before ever opening it. Strongly Agree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly Disagree

No matter what kind of data sampling you choose, you need to allow time to collect the information and then analyze it. For example, if you create a survey of five questions, and you have your audience of 20 people complete the survey, you will need to deal with 100 survey forms. At high levels such as political polling, the audience members quickly click on their answers on a webpage or on a hand-held “clicker,” and the specific survey software instantly collects and collates the information for the researchers. If you are in a small community group or a college class, it is more likely that you will be doing your survey “the old-fashioned way” – so you will need some time to mark each individual response on a “master sheet” and then average or summarize the results in an effective way to use in your speech-writing and speech-giving.

### categories of audience analysis

No matter which of the above inquiry methods you choose to do your audience analysis, you will, at some point, need to direct your attention to the five “categories” of audience analysis. These are the five categories through which you will learn to better appreciate your audience. Let’s now examine these categories and understand the variables and constraints you should use to estimate your audience’s information requirements.

### situational analysis

The situational audience analysis category considers the situation for which your audience is gathered. This category is primarily concerned with why your audience is assembled in the first place (Caernaven-Smith, 1983). Are they willingly gathered to hear you speak? Have your audience members paid to hear you? Or, are your audience members literally “speech captives” who have somehow been socially or systematically coerced into hearing you? These factors are decisively important because they place a major responsibility upon you as a speaker, whichever the case. The entire

### Likert-type testing

The final method of assessing your audience’s attitudes deals with Likert-type testing. Likert-type testing is when you make a statement, and ask the respondent to gauge the depth of their sentiments toward that statement either positively, negatively, or neutrally. Typically, each scale will have 5 weighted response categories, being +2, +1, 0, -1, and -2. What the Likert-type test does, that other tests do not do, is measure the extent to which attitudes are held. See how the Likert-

type test does this in the example on “unsolicited email” in Figure 5.1.

A small Likert-type test will tell you where your audience, generally speaking, stands on issues. As well, it will inform you as to the degree of the audience’s beliefs on these issues. The Likert-type test should be used when attempting to assess a highly charged or polarizing issue, because it will tell you, in rough numbers, whether or not your audience agrees or disagrees with your topic.



tone and agenda of your speech rests largely upon whether or not your audience even wants to hear from you.

Many audiences are considered captive audiences in that they have no real choice regarding the matter of hearing a given speech. In general, these are some of the most difficult audiences to address because these members are being forced to listen to a message, and do not have the full exercise of their own free will.

Consider for a moment when you have been called to a mandatory work meeting. Were you truly happy to listen to the speaker, in all honesty? Some might say “yes,” but usually most would rather be doing something else with their time. This is an important factor to keep in mind when preparing your speech: some people simply do not want to listen to a speech they believe is compulsory.

The voluntary audience situation, in stark contrast, is completely different. A voluntary audience is willingly assembled to listen to a given message. As a rule, these audiences are much easier to address because they are interested in hearing the speech. To visualize how this works, reflect upon the last speech, concert, or show you’ve chosen to attend. While the event may or may not have lived up to your overall expectations, the very fact that you freely went to the occasion speaks volumes about your predisposition to listen to—and perhaps even be

persuaded by—the information being presented.

Sometimes audiences are mixed in their situational settings, too. Take the everyday classroom situation, for instance. While students choose to attend higher education, many people in the college classroom environment sadly feel as if they are still “trapped” in school and would rather be elsewhere. On the other hand, some students in college are truly there by choice, and attentively seek out knowledge from their teacher-mentors. What results from this mixed audience situation is a hybrid captive-voluntary audience, with those who are only partially interested in what is going on in the classroom and those who are genuinely involved. You literally get to hone your speech skills on both types of audiences, thereby learning a skill set that many never get to exercise. You should begin this wonderful opportunity by considering ways to inform, persuade, and humor a mixed situation audience. Think of it as a learning occasion, and you’ll do just fine.

---

*Being popular with an audience is a very rickety ladder to be on.*

~ Louis C. K.

### demographic analysis

The second category of audience analysis is **demography**. As mentioned before, demographics are literally a classification of the characteristics of the people. Whenever addressing an audience, it is generally a good idea to know about its age, gender, major, year in school, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, et cetera. There are two steps in doing an accurate demographic analysis: gathering demographic data and interpreting this data (Benjamin, 1969).

Sometimes, this information is gathered by the questionnaire sampling method, and is done formally. On other occasions, this information is already available in a database and is made available to the speaker. Some noteworthy speakers even have

“scouts” who do demographic research on an audience prior to a speaking event, and make interpretations on that audience based upon key visual cues. For example, congresspersons and senators frequently make public appearances where they use stock speeches to appeal to certain audiences with specific demographic uniqueness. In order to know what type of audience he or she will be addressing, these politicians dispatch staff aides to an event to see how many persons of color, hecklers, and supporters will be in attendance. Of course, studying demographic characteristics is, indeed, more an art form than a science. Still, it is a common practice among many professional speakers.

Consider for a moment how valuable it would be to you as a public speaker to know that your audience will be mostly female, between the ages of 25 and 40, mostly married, and Caucasian. Would you change your message to fit this demographic? Or, would you keep your message the same, no matter the audience you were addressing? Chances are you would be more inclined to talk to issues bearing upon those gender, age, and race qualities. Frankly, the smart speaker would shift his or her message to adapt to the audience. And, simply, that’s the purpose of doing demographics: to embed within your message the acceptable parameters of your audience’s range of needs.



This, of course, raises an extremely important ethical issue for the modern speaker. Given the ability to study demographic data and therefore to study your audience, does a speaker shift his or her message to play to the audience entirely? Ethically, a speaker should not shift his or her message and should remain true to his or her motives. Only you will be able to alleviate the tension between a speaker’s need to adapt to an audience and his or her need to remain true to form (Natalle & Bodenheimer, 2004).

*My greatest challenge has been to change the mindset of people. Mindsets play strange tricks on us. We see things the way our minds have instructed our eyes to see.*  
 ~ Muhammad Yunus

**psychological analysis**

Unless your selected speech topic is a complete mystery to your audience, your listeners will already hold “attitudes, beliefs, and values” toward the ideas you will inevitably present. As a result, it is always important to know where your audience stands on the issues you plan to address ahead of time. The best way to accomplish this is to sample your audience with a quick questionnaire or survey prior to the event. This is known as the third category of audience analysis, or **psychological description**. When performing a description you seek to identify the audience’s attitudes, beliefs, and values (Campbell & Huxman, 2003). They are your keys to understanding how your audience thinks.

**attitudes**

In basic terms, an **attitude** is a learned disposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a person, an object, an idea, or an event (Jastrow, 1918). Attitudes come in different forms. You are very likely to see an attitude present itself when someone says that they are “pro” or “anti” something. But, above all else, attitudes are learned and not necessarily

Table 5.2 Examples of Attitudes
Pro-/Anti-war
Pro-diversity
Anti-affirmative action
Pro-choice
Pro-life
Pro-/Anti-gambling
Pro-/Anti-prostitution
Pro-/Anti-capital punishment
Pro-/Anti-free trade
Pro-/Anti-outsourcing
Pro-/Anti-welfare
Pro-/Anti-corporate tax cuts
Pro-/Anti-censorship

enduring. Attitudes can change, and sometimes do, whereas beliefs and values do not shift as easily. A sample list of attitudes can be found in Table 5.2.

These are just a small range of issues that one can either be “for” or “against.” And, while we are simplifying the social scientific idea of an attitude considerably here, these examples serve our purposes well. Remember, attitudes are not as durable as beliefs and values. But, they are good indicators of how people view the persons, objects, ideas, or events that shape their world.

*Other people's beliefs may be myths, but not mine.*

~ Mason Cooley

**beliefs**

Beliefs are principles (Bem, 1970) or assumptions about the universe. Beliefs are more durable than attitudes because beliefs are hinged to ideals and not issues. For example, you may believe in the principle: “what goes around comes around.” If you do, you believe in the notion of karma. And so, you may align your behaviors to be consistent with this belief philosophy. You do not engage in unethical or negative behavior because you believe that it will “come back” to you. Likewise, you may try to exude behaviors that are ethical and positive

because you wish for this behavior to return, in kind. You may not think this at all, and believe quite the opposite. Either way, there is a belief in operation driving what you think. Some examples of beliefs are located in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Examples of Beliefs
The world was created by God.
Marijuana is an addictive gateway drug.
Ghosts are all around us.
Smoking causes cancer.
Anyone can acquire HIV.
Evolution is fact, not fiction.
Marijuana is neither addictive nor harmful.
Ghosts are products of our imagination.
Smoking does not cause cancer.
Only high-risk groups acquire HIV.

**values**

A value, on the other hand, is a guiding belief that regulates our attitudes (Rokeach, 1968). Values are the core principles driving our attitudes. If you probe into someone’s attitudes and beliefs far enough, you will inevitably find an underlying value. Importantly, you should also know that we structure our values in accordance to our own value hierarchy, or mental schema of values placed in order of their relative individual importance. Each of us has our own values that we subscribe to and a value hierarchy that we use to navigate the issues of the world. But we really aren’t even aware that we have a value hierarchy until some of our values come in direct conflict with each other. Then, we have to negotiate something called **cognitive dissonance**, or the mental stress caused by the choice we are forced to make between two considerable alternatives.

Table 5.4 Examples of Values

Inner Harmony	Enjoyment	Belonging
Friendship	Trust	Equality
Control	Family	Security
Peace	Wisdom	Tradition
Unity	Achievement	Power
Generosity	Conformity	Intelligence
Leadership	Creativity	Responsibility
Health	Independence	Loyalty

For example, let's assume that you value "having fun" a great deal. You like to party with your friends and truly enjoy yourself. And, in this day and age, who doesn't? However, now that you are experiencing a significant amount of independence and personal freedom, you have many life options at your disposal. Let's also say that some of your close personal friends are doing drugs. You are torn. Part of you wants to experience the "fun" that your close friends may be experiencing; but, the more sane part of you wants to responsibly decline. In honesty, you are juxtaposed between two of your own values—having "fun" and being responsible. This real life example is somewhat exaggerated for your benefit. Realize that we make decisions small and grand, based on our value hierarchies. Some basic values common to people around the world can be found in Table 5.4.

*Values aren't buses... They're not supposed to get you anywhere. They're supposed to define who you are.*

~ Jennifer Crusie

### multicultural analysis

Demography looks at issues of race and ethnicity in a basic sense. However, in our increasingly diverse society, it is worthy to pay particular attention to the issue of speaking to a multicultural audience (as discussed in Chapter 14 *Speaking to a Global Audience*). Odds are that any real world audience that you encounter will have an underlying multicultural dimension. As a speaker, you need to

recognize that the perspective you have on any given topic may not necessarily be shared by all of the members of your audience (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). Therefore, it is imperative that you become a culturally effective speaker. Culturally effective speakers develop the capacity to appreciate other cultures and acquire the necessary skills to speak effectively to people with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Keep these factors in mind when writing a speech for a diverse audience.

### language

Many people speak different languages, so if you are translating words, do not use slang or jargon, which can be confusing. You could add a visual aid (a poster, a picture, a PowerPoint slide or two) which would show your audience what you mean – which instantly translates into the audience member's mind (Klopf & Cambra, 1991; Tauber & Mester, 1994).

### cognition

Realize that different cultures have different cultural-cognitive processes, or ways of looking at the very concept of logic itself. Accordingly, gauge your audience as to their diverse ways



of thinking and be sensitive to these differing logics.

### ethnocentricity

Remember that in many cases you will be appealing to people from other cultures. Do not assume that your culture is dominant or better than other cultures. That assumption is called ethnocentrism, and ethnocentric viewpoints have the tendency to drive a wedge between you and your audience (Pearson, et al, 2011).

*Christian, Jew, Muslim, shaman, Zoroastrian, stone, ground, mountain, river, each has a secret way of being with the mystery, unique and not to be judged.*

~ Rumi

### values

Not only do individuals have value systems of their own, but societies promote value systems, as well. Keep in mind the fact that you will be appealing to value hierarchies that are socially-laden, as well as those that are individually-borne.

### communication styles

While you are trying to balance these language, cognition, cultural, and value issues, you should also recognize that some cultures prefer a more animated delivery style than do others. The intelligent speaker will understand this, and adapt his or her verbal and nonverbal delivery accordingly.

### interest and knowledge analysis

Finally, if the goal of your speech is to deliver a unique and stirring presentation (and it should be), you need to know ahead of time if your audience is interested in what you have to say, and has any prior knowledge about your topic. You do not want to give a boring or trite speech. Instead, you want to put your best work forward, and let your audience see your confidence and preparation shine through. And, you don't want to make a speech that your audience already knows a lot about. So, your job here is



to “test” your topic by sampling your audience for their topic interest and topic knowledge. Defined, topic interest is the significance of the topic to a given audience; often related to the uniqueness of a speaker’s topic. Likewise, topic knowledge is the general amount of information that the audience possesses on a given topic. These are not mere definitions listed for the sake of argument; these are essential analytical components of effective speech construction.

---

*Anyone who teaches me deserves my respect, honoring and attention.*

~ Sonia Rumzi

Unlike multicultural audience analysis, evaluating your audience’s topic interest and topic knowledge is a fairly simple task. One can do this through informal question and answer dialogue, or through an actual survey. Either way, it is best to have some information, rather than none at all. Imagine the long list of topics that people have heard over and over and over. You can probably name some yourself, right now, without giving it much thought. If you started listing some topics to yourself, please realize that this is the point of this section of this module; your audience is literally thinking the same exact thing you are. Given that, topic preparation is strategically important to your overall speech success.

Again, do not underestimate the power of asking your audience whether

or not your topic actually interests them. If you find that many people are not interested in your topic, or already know a lot about it, you have just saved yourself from a potentially mind-numbing exercise. After all, do you really want to give a speech where your audience could care less about your topic—or even worse—they know more about the topic than you do yourself? Not at all! The purpose of this section is to help you search for the highly sought-after public speaking concept called **uniqueness**, which is when a topic rises to the level of being singularly exceptional in interest and knowledge to a given audience.

We know that you wish to excel in giving your speech, and indeed you shall. But first, let’s make sure that your audience is engaged by your topic and hasn’t already heard the subject matter so much that they, themselves, could give the speech without much (if any) preparation.

One final note: There’s an old adage in communication studies that reasons: “know what you know; know what you don’t know; and, know the difference between the two.” In other words, don’t use puffery to blind your audience about your alleged knowledge on a particular subject. Remember, there is likely to be someone in your audience who knows as much about your topic, if not more, than you do. If you get caught trying to field an embarrassing question, you might just lose the most important thing you have as a speaker: your credibility. If you know the answer, respond accordingly. If you do not know the answer, respond accordingly. But, above all, try and be a resource for your audience. They expect you to be something of an expert on the topic you choose to address.

---

*Given the choice between trivial material brilliantly told versus profound material badly told, an audience will always choose the trivial told brilliantly.*

~ Robert McKee

## conclusion

When considering topics for your speech, it is critical for you to keep your audience in mind. Not doing so will put your speech at risk of not corresponding with the information needs of your audience, and further jeopardize your credibility as a speaker. This chapter examined methods of conducting an audience analysis and five categories of audience analysis. In sum, this information equips you with the foundational knowledge and skill-set required to ensure that your topic complements your audience. And, after all, if we are not adapting to meet the needs of our audience, we are not going to be informative or convincing speakers.



Winston Churchill is credited with the origin of the saying: “Fail to plan, plan to fail” (Lakein, 1989). We, your authors, believe that if you have failed to fully consider the nature, make-up, and characteristics of your audience, you are—for all intents and purposes—neglecting the spirit of the public speaking exercise. Confidently speaking to audiences can be somewhat addictive. The experience, when properly executed, can be empowering and help you succeed personally and professionally throughout your life. But, you must first consider the audience you will be addressing and take their every requirement into account (Lewis, 1989). We are linked to, joined with, if not bound by, our audiences. Your main speaking ambition should be to seek identification with them, and for them to seek identification with you.

## review questions and activities

### review questions

1. Why is it important to conduct an audience analysis prior to developing your speech?
2. What is the purpose of performing a demographics survey?
3. Why is audience analysis by direct observation the most simple of the three paradigms?
4. What are some the problems a speaker faces when delivering an unacquainted-audience presentation?
5. Under what circumstances would a speaker make inferences about an audience during the course of an audience analysis??
6. What is a variable, and how is it used in data sampling?
7. Why are statistics considered to be a form of quantitative analysis and not qualitative analysis?
8. How does conducting a value hierarchy help the speaker when developing a speech?
9. What value does performing a Likert-type testing of attitudes give the speaker?
10. Which of the Five Categories of Audience Analysis is the most effective, and why do you think that?
11. What are the differences between beliefs, attitudes, and values?
12. What challenges does a speaker face when delivering a speech to a multicultural audience?

### activities

1. If you know who your audience will be prior to speaking, try performing a demographic analysis. You may want to find out data, such as age, group affiliation, sex, socio-economic status, marital status, etc. Once you've done that, see if any of that information can impact any aspects of your speech. If it does, then determine how and why it impacts your speech.
2. Another survey to conduct is an attitudinal survey. If you are delivering a persuasive speech, you'll want to know what your audience thinks about your topic. Audience members who have opinions about things generally have a self-interest in it; that is why they are interested in what you have to say. Perform a Likert-type survey analysis to help you determine how best to create your speech.
3. As you know, a person's values are the most difficult for any speaker to change. You can perform a values survey to determine how difficult it will be to change the minds of your audience. Every persuasive speech addresses some value or values. Take a position, such as "consuming horse meat as an alternative to beef," and ask potential audience members how they feel about eating horse meat – why and why not. By conducting a hypothetical survey you begin to understand how to create an effective survey and why it is so important to the speaker to conduct.

## glossary

**Attitude**

An attitude is a learned disposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a person, an object, an idea, or an event.

**Audience Analysis**

A speaker analyzes an audience for demographics, dispositions and knowledge of the topic.

**Beliefs**

Beliefs are principles and are more durable than attitudes because beliefs are hinged to ideals and not issues.

**Cognitive Dissonance**

The psychological discomfort felt when a person is presented with two competing ideas or pieces of evidence.

**Demographics**

Demographics are the most recent statistical characteristics of a population.

**Demographic Characteristics**

Demographic characteristics are facts about the make-up of a population.

**Demography**

Demographics are literally a classification of the characteristics of the people.

**Inference**

Making an inference is the act or process of deriving logical conclusions from premises known or assumed to be true.

**Ordered category**

An ordered category is a condition of logical or comprehensible arrangement among the separate elements of a group.

**Paradigm**

A paradigm is a pattern that describes distinct concepts or thoughts in any scientific discipline or other epistemological context.

**Psychological Description**

A psychological description is a description of the audience's attitudes, beliefs, and values.

**Quantitative Analysis**

A quantitative analysis is the process of determining the value of a variable by examining its numerical, measurable characteristics.

**Statistics**

Statistics is the study of the collection, organization, analysis, and interpretation of data.

**Unacquainted-Audience Presentation**

An unacquainted-audience presentation is a speech when you are completely unaware of your audience's characteristics.

**Uniqueness**

Uniqueness occurs when a topic rises to the level of being exceptional in interest and knowledge to a given audience.

**Variable**

A variable is a characteristic of a unit being observed that may assume more than one of a set of values to which a numerical measure or a category from a classification can be assigned.

**Value**

A value is a guiding belief that regulates our attitudes.

**Value Hierarchy**

A value hierarchy is a person's value structure placed in relationship to a given value set.

## references

- Bem, D. J. (1970). *Beliefs, attitudes, and human affairs*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co.
- Benjamin, B. (1969). *Demographic analysis*. New York: Praeger.
- Caernarven-Smith, P. (1983). *Audience analysis & response (1st Ed.)*. Pembroke, MA: Firman Technical Publications.
- Campbell, K.K. & Huxman, S.S. *The Rhetorical Act: Thinking, Speaking, and Writing Critically (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Clevenger, T. (1966). *Audience analysis*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Dwyer, K.K. (2005) *Conquer your speech anxiety: Second Edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Eisenberg, I. & Wynn, D. (2013) *Think communication*. Boston: Pearson.
- Gamble, T.K. & Gamble, M. (2013). *Communication works*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Jastrow, J. (1918). *The psychology of conviction: A study of beliefs and attitudes*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Klopf, D.W. & Cambra, R.E. (1991) *Speaking skills for prospective teachers (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)*. Englewood, CO: Morton Publishing Company.
- Lakein, A. (1989) *How to get control of your time and your life*. New York: Signet.
- Lewis, D. (1989) *The secret language of success*. New York: Galahad Books.
- McQuail, D. (1997). *Audience analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Natalle, E.J. & Bodenheimer, F.R. (2004) *The woman's public speaking handbook*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Nierenberg, G.I. & Calero, H.H. (1994) *How to read a person like a book*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books.
- Pearson, J.C., Nelson, P.E., Titsworth, S. & Harter, L. (2011). *Human communication (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.)*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Pressat, R. (1972). *Demographic analysis; methods, results, applications*. Chicago: Aldine-Atherton.
- Rokeach, M. (1968). *Beliefs, attitudes, and values; a theory of organization and change (1st ed.)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Tauber, R.T. & Mester, C.S. *Acting Lessons for Teachers, Using Performance Skills in the Classroom*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Ting-Toomey, S & Chung, L.C. (2005). *Understanding intercultural communication*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing.
- Tucker, K.T.; Weaver, II, R.L.; Berryman-Fink, C. (1981). *Research in speech communication*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

## photo credits

- p. 1 Audience at RZA book reading  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RZA\\_Audience\\_Shankbone\\_2009\\_Tao\\_of\\_Wu.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RZA_Audience_Shankbone_2009_Tao_of_Wu.jpg)  
 By David Shankbone
- p. 3 Mobile HCI 2008 Audience  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MobileHCI\\_2008\\_Audience.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MobileHCI_2008_Audience.jpg)  
 By Nhenze
- p. 6 Speakers at Wiki Conference 2011  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wiki\\_Conference\\_2011.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wiki_Conference_2011.JPG)  
 By Sucheta Ghoshal
- p. 9 Audience enjoys Stallman's jokes  
[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/63/Audience\\_enjoy\\_Stallman%27s\\_jokes](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/63/Audience_enjoy_Stallman%27s_jokes)  
 By Damian Buonamico
- p. 9 Side shot audience  
[http://www.flickr.com/photos/us\\_embassy\\_newzealand/4747176345/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/us_embassy_newzealand/4747176345/)  
 By U.S. Embassy New Zealand