

What you're trying to say and how to put it must be based on whether these are hands-on people, management, staff, customers, or laymen. Therefore find out what they already know about and how deeply they know it. How much experience have they actually had in dealing with your subject? Most of all, from what point of view do you wish to talk to them?

- *Educational level*

The choice of language and metaphor as well as how deep you go is also determined by where your audience stands educationally. Talking over people's heads is the most patronizing and self-destructive thing you can do as a speaker. It's guaranteed to turn people off and make them hostile.

For less well-educated audiences, never make the mistake of becoming *simplistic*. Learning what people don't know should challenge you to *simplify*, to *edit* and make *clear*, but *not* to talk down.

Another aspect of knowing about the educational level of your audience is how *long* you can speak and how *detailed* you can get. For highly trained audiences, accustomed to research and lectures, your horizons are opened for a lengthier form of explanation (although *everyone* has a cut-off point). For less informed listeners a more practical, less theoretical approach should probably be taken with more time spent on why they should listen at all and where this subject fits in their lives.

- *Socioeconomic level*

Granted, we're working from stereotypes when we presume to know an audience merely by knowing their salary level, probable bank balance, or status of bills payable. Yet, suburban homeowner, inner-city solo loft dweller, or apartment renter with roommate all are conditioned by their social and economic experiences and can respond from very different mental sets.

- *Ethnic differences*

It's also important to be aware of the different kinds of belief systems and morality issues that are shared by ethnic groups in various parts of the country and how *that* might affect how you structure your message.

Coming in with a very avant-garde plan, for example, blissfully unaware of the conservative family and business traditions in a certain section, is a one-way street to being turned down. So learn something about the unique make-up of your audience and how their backgrounds or belief systems could affect how they hear you.