**Approach to Audience Analysis**

Develop methods of analyzing your audience before you speak by seeking demographic, psychological, and situational information about your audience and the speaking occasion. Learning about your audience members’ backgrounds and attitudes can help you select a topic, define a purpose, develop an outline, and carry out virtually all other speech related activities.

You can gather and analyze three primary types of information:

1. Demographic 2. Psychological 3. Situational

**Demographic analysis of audience**

As we noted previously, demographics are statistics about such audience characteristics as age, gender, sexual orientation, race and culture, group membership, and socioeconomic status. Some demographic audience characteristics can be inferred through observation (such as age), but not all are as easily determined (such as sexual orientation, cultural background, and group membership). Now let’s consider how examining demographic information, or demographic audience analysis, can help you better understand and adapt to your audience. age Although you must use caution in generalizing from only one factor, information about the age of audience members can suggest the kinds of examples, humor, illustrations, and other types of supporting material to use in your speech. Many students in your public-speaking class will probably be in their early twenties; some may be older. The younger students may know the latest hip-hop performers or musicians, for example, but the older ones may not be familiar with them. If you are going to give a talk on music, you will have to explain who the performers are and describe or demonstrate their style if you want all the members of your class to understand what you are talking about. For centuries, adults have lamented that younger generations don’t seem to share the same values as older generations. More than two thousand years ago, the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates is reported to have complained, “The children now love luxury; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise . . . . They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize over their teachers.”

1. Age

The following table summarizes the values and generational characteristics of five generations—matures, baby boomers, generation X, millennials, and generation Z.

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| Baby Boomers 1943–1960 | •  Personal fulfillment and optimism  •  Crusading causes  •  Buy now/pay later  •  Everybody’s rights  •  Work efficiently |
| Generation X 1961–1981 | •  Live with uncertainty  •  Balance is important  •  Enjoy today  •  Every job is a contract  •  Save to prepare for uncertainty |
| Millennials 1982–2002 | •  Close to parents  •  Feel “special”  •  Goal-oriented  •  Team-oriented  •  Focus on achievement |
| Generation Z 2003- | •  Diversity is important  •  It’s a challenge to achieve the “American Dream”  •  They will likely have multiple jobs  •  Technology and social media are integral to their lives  •  Multitasking is normal |

Cultural analysis of audience

Culture is a learned system of knowledge, behavior, attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms shared by a group of people. Ethnicity is that portion of a person’s cultural background that includes such factors as nationality, religion, language, and ancestral heritage, which are shared by a group of people who have a common geographic origin. Race is a term that has evolved to include a group of people with a common cultural history, nationality, or geographical location, as well as genetically transmitted physical attributes.

An effective speaker adapts to differences in culture, race, and ethnicity. As you approach any public-speaking situation, avoid an ethnocentric mind-set. Ethnocentrism is the assumption that your own cultural approaches are superior to those of other cultures. The audience-centered speaker is sensitive to cultural differences and avoids saying anything that would disparage the cultural background of the audience. They learn as much as possible about the cultural values and knowledge of their audience so that they can understand the best way to deliver their message. Researchers classify or describe cultural value differences.We summarize six categories of differences in the following part and discuss them here. Understanding these value classifications may provide clues to help you adapt your message when you speak before diverse audiences.

●Individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Some cultures place a greater value on individual achievement; others place more value on group or collective achievement. Among the countries that tend to value individual accomplishment are Australia, Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Belgium, and Denmark.By contrast, Japan, Thailand, Colombia, Taiwan, and Venezuela are among countries that have more collectivistic cultures.

How to adapt to listeners from individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Audience members from individualistic cultures, such as the majority of people in the United States, value and respond positively to appeals that encourage personal accomplishment and recognize individual achievement. People from individualistic cultures are expected to speak up to champion individual rights. Audience members from collectivistic cultures, such as many people who were raised in an Asian culture, may be more likely to value group or team recognition. They may not like to be singled out for individual accomplishments. Community is an important value for those from collectivistic cultures. And they value making sure others are perceived in a positive way; it’s important for them and others to be seen as valued people. When speaking to a predominantly collectivistic audience, you might want to emphasize areas of consensus or community agreement on issues, use examples of community involvement, or ethically highlight the importance of shared effort and achievement in your proposals or appeals.

●High-context and low-context cultures.

The terms high-context and low-context cultures refer to the importance of unspoken or nonverbal messages. In high-context cultures, people place considerable importance on contextual factors such as tone of voice, gestures, facial expression, movement, and other nonverbal aspects of communication. People from low-context traditions place greater emphasis on the words themselves; the surrounding context has a relatively low impact on the meaning of the message. The Arab culture is a high-context culture, as are the cultures of Japan, Asia, and southern Europe. Low-context cultures, which place a higher value on words, include those of Switzerland, Germany, the United States, and Australia.

How to adapt to listeners from high-context and low-context cultures. Listeners from low-context cultures will need and expect more detailed and explicit information from you as a speaker. Subtle and indirect messages are less likely to be effective. People from high-context cultures will pay particular attention to your delivery and to the communication environment when they try to interpret your meaning. They will be less impressed by a speaker who boasts about his or her accomplishments; such an audience will expect and value more indirect ways of establishing credibility. A listener from a high-context culture will also expect a less dramatic and dynamic style of delivery.

● Tolerance of uncertainty and need for certainty.

Some cultures are more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty than others. In contrast, cultures in which people need to have details nailed down tend to develop very specific regulations and rules. People from cultures with a greater tolerance of uncertainty are more comfortable with vagueness and are not upset when all the details aren’t spelled out. Cultures with a high need for certainty include those of Russia, Japan, France, and Costa Rica. Cultures that have a higher tolerance for uncertainty include those of Great Britain and Indonesia. The United States is about in the middle of the scale for tolerance of uncertainty.

How to adapt to listeners from cultures that tolerate or avoid uncertainty. If you are speaking to an audience of people who have a high need for certainty, make sure you provide concrete details when you present your message; they will also want and expect to know what action steps they can take. People who value certainty will respond well if you provide a clear and explicit preview of your message in your introduction; they also seem to prefer a clear, logical, and linear step-by-step organizational pattern. People from cultures that are more comfortable with uncertainty do not necessarily need to have the explicit purpose of the message spelled out for them. In addition, they are generally less likely to need specific prescriptions to solve problems, compared to listeners who want to avoid uncertainty. Telling a story in which the main point is implied rather than explicitly identified may be an effective approach when communicating with listeners who have a high tolerance for uncertainty.

● High-power and low-power cultures.

Power is the ability to influence or control others. Some cultures prefer clearly defined lines of authority and responsibility; these are said to be high-power cultures. People in low-power cultures are more comfortable with blurred lines of authority and less formal titles. Austria, Israel, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, and Great Britain typically have an equitable approach to power distribution. Cultures with high power dimensions include those of the Philippines, Mexico, Venezuela, India, Brazil, and France. The United States is slightly lower (40 points out of 100) on this scale, meaning there is some expectation for shared authority.

How to adapt to listeners from high-power and low-power cultures. People from highpower cultures are more likely to perceive people in leadership roles—including 80 Chapter 5 speakers—as credible. They will also be more comfortable with proposals or solutions that identify or acknowledge differences in social class. Those from low-power cultures often favor more shared approaches to leadership and governance. When speaking to people from low-power cultures, you may want to emphasize democratic collaborative approaches to solving problems or areas of consensus on an issue.

● Long-term and short-term time orientation

.Some cultures take the view that it may take a long time to accomplish certain goals. People from Asian cultures, for example, and from some South American cultures such as that of Brazil often value patience, persistence, and deferred gratification more than people from cultures with a short-term orientation to time. People with a short-term time orientation, which is often a characteristic of industrialized Western cultures such as those of Canada and the United States, are attuned to time and time management. Short-term cultures also value quick responses to problems.

How to adapt to listeners from cultures with long-term and short-term time orientations. When speaking to people who take a long-term orientation to time, you should stress how issues and problems affect not only the present but also the future, especially future generations. It’s not that people with a long-term orientation don’t value efficiency and effectiveness; they simply accept that things don’t always happen quickly. People with a short-term orientation to time will want to learn about immediate action steps that can solve a problem. They are also results-oriented and expect that individual or group effort should result in a specific positive outcome. When possible, provide statistics or other evidence that documents results.

●High-indulgent and low-indulgent cultures.

Some cultures place a high priority in indulging in activities to pursue happiness. The more indulgent a culture, the less focused they are on controlling their desires and impulses. High-indulgent cultures actively seek and expect freedom. They also tend to place a high value on leisure activities and sports. Other cultures are less indulgent; they are more restrained and do not expect to have all of their needs met to be happy. The United States scores high on indulgence compared to many other cultures.

How to adapt to listeners from cultures with high-indulgent and low-indulgent orientations. High-indulgent cultures, such as the United States, will value and appreciate appeals to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Motivating factors for highly indulgent cultures include having the time and opportunity for sports, leisure activities, and fun. Those from lower indulgent cultures, such as Russia, China, and much of Eastern Europe, tend to be less motivated by these kinds of opportunities. Instead, appealing to hard work and accomplishment are more likely to be strong, positive motivators.

**Psychological Analysis of Audience**

Demographic information lets you make useful inferences about your audience and predict likely responses. A psychological audience analysis explores an audience’s attitudes toward a topic, purpose, and speaker while probing the underlying beliefs and values that might affect these attitudes. Learning whether members of your audience agree or disagree with your purpose may provide specific clues to help you anticipate their reactions to your message It is important for a speaker to distinguish among attitudes, beliefs, and values. The attitudes, beliefs, and values of an audience may greatly influence a speaker’s selection of a topic and specific purpose, as well as other aspects of speech preparation and delivery. An attitude reflects likes or dislikes. Do you like health food? Are you for or against capital punishment? Should movies be censored? What are your views on gun control? Your answers to these widely varied questions reflect your attitudes. A belief is what you hold to be true or false. If you think the sun will rise in the east in the morning, you hold a belief about the sun based on what you perceive to be true or false. A value is an enduring concept of good and bad, right and wrong. More deeply ingrained than either attitudes or beliefs, values are therefore more resistant to change. Values support both attitudes and beliefs. For example, you like health food because you believe that natural products are more healthful. And you value good health. You are against capital punishment because you believe that it is wrong to kill people. You value human life. As with beliefs, a speaker who has some understanding of an audience’s values is better able to adapt a speech to them. analyzing attitudes toward the topic

It is useful to know how members of an audience feel about your topic. Are they interested or apathetic? If the topic is controversial, are they for or against it? Knowing the answers to these questions from the outset lets you adjust your message accordingly. For example, if you plan to talk about increasing taxes to improve education in your state, you probably want to know how your listeners feel about taxes and education. When you analyze your audience, it may help to categorize the group along three dimensions: interested–uninterested, favorable–unfavorable, and captive–voluntary.

With an interested audience, your task is simply to hold and amplify their interest throughout the speech. If your audience is uninterested, you need to find ways to hook them. Given our visually oriented culture, consider using visual aids to gain and maintain the attention of apathetic listeners. You may also want to gauge how favorable or unfavorable your audience may feel toward you and your message before you begin to speak. Some audiences, of course, may be neutral, apathetic, or simply uninformed about what you plan to say. Even if your objective is simply to inform, it is useful to know whether your audience is predisposed to respond positively or negatively toward you or your message. Giving an informative talk about classical music would be quite challenging, for example, if you were addressing an audience of die-hard punk-rock fans. You might decide to show the connections between classical music and punk to arouse their interest.

**Situational analysis of audience**

So far we have concentrated on the people who will be your listeners, as the primary focus of being an audience-centered speaker. You should also consider your speaking situation. Situational audience analysis includes an examination of the time and place of your speech, the size of your audience, and the speaking occasion. Although these elements are not technically characteristics of the audience, they can have a major effect on how listeners respond to you. You may have no control over when you will be speaking, but when designing and delivering a talk, a skilled public speaker considers the time of day as well as audience expectations about the speech length. If you are speaking to a group of exhausted parents during a midweek evening meeting of the band-boosters club, you can bet they will appreciate a direct, to-the-point presentation more than a long oration. If you are on a program with other speakers, speaking first or last on the program carries a slight edge because people tend to remember what comes first or last. Speaking early in the morning when people may not be quite awake, after lunch when they may feel a bit drowsy, or late in the afternoon when they are tired may mean you’ll have to strive consciously for a more energetic delivery to keep your listeners’ attention. Be mindful of your time limits. If your audience expects you to speak for 20 minutes, it is usually better to end either right at 20 minutes or a little earlier; most North Americans don’t appreciate being kept overtime for a speech. In your public-speaking class you will be given time limits, and you may wonder whether such strict time-limit expectations occur outside public-speaking class. The answer is a most definite yes. Whether it’s a business presentation or a speech to the city council or school board, time limits are often strictly enforced.

Size of audience The size of your audience directly affects speaking style and audience expectations about delivery. As a general rule, the larger the audience, the more likely they are to expect a more formal style. With an audience of ten or fewer, you can punctuate a conversational style by taking questions. If you and your listeners are so few that you can fit around a table, they may expect you to stay seated for your presentation. Many business “speeches” are given around a conference table. A group of 20 to 30 people—the size of most public-speaking classes—will expect more formality than an audience of a dozen or fewer. Your speaking style can still be conversational, but your speech should be appropriately structured and well organized; your delivery may include more expansive gestures than you would display during a one-on-one chat with a friend or colleague. If you are speaking to a much larger group in a lecture hall, you may also want to use more expansive gestures as well as a microphone to amplify your voice.

Location

In your speech class, you have the advantage of knowing what the room looks like, but in a new speaking situation, you may not have that advantage. If at all possible, visit the place where you will speak to examine the physical setting and find out, for example, how far the audience will be from the lectern. Physical conditions such as room temperature and lighting can affect your performance, the audience response, and the overall success of the speech.

Occasion

Another important way to gain clues about your listeners is to consider the reason why they are here. What occasion brings this audience together? The mind-set of people gathered for a funeral will obviously be different from that of people who’ve asked you to say a few words after a banquet. Knowing the occasion helps you predict both the demographic characteristics of the audience and their state of mind. If you’re presenting a speech at an annual or monthly meeting, you have the advantage of being able to ask those who’ve attended previous presentations what kind of audience typically gathers for the occasion. Your best source of information may be either the person who invited you to speak or someone who has attended similar events. Knowing when you will speak on the program or whether a meal will be served before or after you talk will help you gauge audience expectations. Advance preparation will help you avoid last-minute surprises about the speaking environment and the physical arrangements for your speech. Table 5.5 provides a list of essential questions you should ask when preparing for a speaking assignment, as well as several suggestions for adapting to your speaking situation. A well-prepared speaker adapts his or her message not only to the audience but also to t