**Audience adaptation strategy**

Audience diversity, however, involves factors beyond ethnic and cultural differences. Central to our point about considering your audience is examining the full spectrum of audience diversity, not just cultural differences. Each topic we’ve reviewed when discussing demographic and psychological aspects of an audience contributes to overall audience diversity. Diversity simply means differences. Audience members are diverse. The question and challenge for a public speaker is, “How do I ethically adapt to listeners with such different backgrounds and experiences?” We offer several general strategies. You could decide to focus on a target audience, consciously use a variety of methods of adapting to listeners, seek common ground, or consider using powerful visual images to present your key points.

●● Focus on a target audience. A target audience is a specific segment of your audience that you most want to address or influence. When consciously focusing on a target audience, the challenge is not to lose or alienate the rest of your listeners—to keep the entire audience in mind while simultaneously making a specific attempt to hit your target segment. For example, Sasha was trying to convince his listeners to invest in the stock market instead of relying only on Social Security. He wisely decided to focus on the younger listeners; those approaching retirement age have already made their major investment decisions. Although he focused on the younger members of his audience, however, Sasha didn’t forget the mature listeners. He suggested that older listeners encourage their children or grandchildren to consider his proposal. He focused on a target audience, but he didn’t ignore others.

●● Use diverse strategies for a diverse audience. Another approach you can adopt, either separately or in combination with a target audience focus, is to use a variety of strategies to reflect the diversity of your audience. If you’ve made an effort to gather information about your audience, you should know the various constituencies that will likely be present for your talk. Consider using several methods to reach the different listeners in your audience. For example, review the following strategies:

1. Use a variety of supporting materials, including illustrations, examples, statistics, and opinions.
2. Remember the power of stories. People from most cultures appreciate a good story. And some people, such as those from Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, prefer hearing stories and parables used to make a point or support an argument rather than facts and statistics.
3. If you’re uncertain about cultural preferences, use a balance of both logical support (statistics, facts, specific examples) and emotional support (stories and illustrations).

●● Identify common values. People have long debated whether there are universal human values. Several scholars have made strong arguments that common human values do exist. Communication researcher David Kale suggests that all people can identify with the individual struggle to enhance one’s own dignity and worth, although different cultures express that struggle in different ways.

A second common value is the search for a world at peace. Underlying that quest is a fundamental desire for equilibrium, balance, and stability. Although there may always be a small but corrosive minority of people whose actions do not support the universal value of peace, the prevailing human values in most cultures ultimately do. Intercultural communication scholars Larry Samovar and Richard Porter suggest other commonalities that people from all cultures share. They propose that all humans seek physical pleasure as well as emotional and psychological pleasure and confirmation, and seek to avoid personal harm.

These similarities offer some basis for developing common messages with universal meaning. Identifying common cultural issues and similarities can help you establish common ground with your audience, a goal we introduced in this chapter. If you are speaking about an issue on which you and your audience have widely different views, identifying a larger common value that is relevant to your topic (such as the importance of peace, prosperity, or family) can help you find a foothold so that your listeners will at least listen to your ideas.

●● Rely on visual materials that transcend language differences. Pictures and other images can communicate universal messages— especially emotional ones. Although there is no universal language, most listeners, regardless of culture and language, can comprehend visible expressions of pain, joy, sorrow, and happiness. An image of a mother holding the frail, malnourished body of her dying child communicates the ravages of famine without elaborate verbal explanations. The more varied your listeners’ cultural experiences, the more effective it can be to use visual materials to illustrate your ideas.