

The Audience-Centered Approach

Brief: The audience-centered approach involves preparing a speech with a focus on the audience rather than the speaker or the message.

Learning Objective: Understand the importance of the audience-centered approach to public speaking.

Key Terms:

- Audience-centered speech: A presentation designed and presented with the goal of connecting with a particular audience.

Types of Presentation Orientations

Speaker-Centered Speeches

When a presentation is speaker-centered, it's a one-way communication that's all about the speaker delivering messages to an audience. Speaker-centered presenters don't engage in an interactive, two-way conversation. They don't pay attention to connecting with their audience. Instead, they present to the room; the audience is treated as a thing rather than a composition of people. They are the experts and the audience, by contrast, is unformed.

Audience members can immediately sense when the speaker doesn't sincerely care about connecting with them. They know instinctually that the speech is really all about the speaker. Therefore, audience members who are talked at tend to tune out.

Content-Centered Speeches

In contrast to speaker-centered presentations that are all about the speaker, content-centered presentations are all about the content. In content-centered presentations, the emphasis is on conveying messages about the topic.

Like speaker-centered presentations, content-centered presentations become one-way communications. In a content-centered presentation, the speaker delivers all that he or she knows about a topic, which is often much more than the audience needs or wants to know. Unlike speaker-centered presenters, content-centered presenters do care about their audience as a composition of people. However, above all else, they care passionately about their topic.

Ironically, content-centered presenters often attempt to demonstrate how much they care about their audience by cramming as much information as they can into their audience's head during the allotted time. Overwhelmed by too much information, their audience members tend to tune out.

Audience-Centered Speeches

Audience-centered presentations are not one-way communications. Rather, audience-centered presenters view the audience as a group of individuals, each with his or her own perceptions and needs. The goal of audience-centered presenters is not to present as much information as they can about their topics. Instead, the goal of an audience-centered presenter is to engage with the audience in a two-way communication, in an attempt to connect and make a difference.

Naturally, audience members are much more likely to listen to speakers who show an interest in them. Audience-centered speeches, therefore, are more effective than speaker-centered and content-centered presentations.

Preparing for Audience-Centered Presentations

In order to prepare, it is important to learn as much as you can about your audience and to adapt your message to the particular needs of that audience.

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, taking into consideration factors such as age, gender, sexual orientation, education, religion, culture, ethnicity, race, and group memberships. Additionally, learning about the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the audience members will allow you to shape your message.

From Concept to Action

Consider a topic you'd like to speak about. Imagine presenting this topic from each of the three presentation orientations. How would the speech differ for each approach? How would the audience react depending upon the orientation? What would it feel like to deliver each type of speech?

OER TEXT SOURCES:

"The Importance of Audience Analysis." Lumen Learning. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-communications/chapter/the-importance-of-audience-analysis>. Accessed 12 April 2019. [CC BY-SA 4.0]