Help Your Audience Listen

Brief: Sensory enhancements are elements that stimulate an audience's senses and break up a presentation into memorable chunks that are more easily understood.

Learning Objective: Identify how to prevent information overload and enhance audience comprehension by incorporating sensory enhancements.

Key Terms:
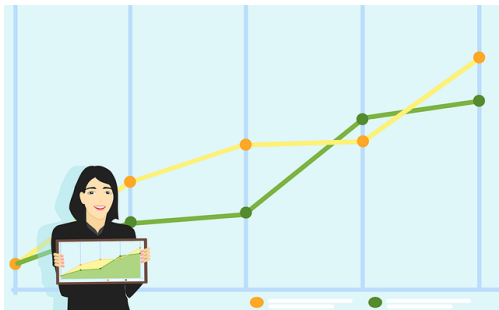- Information Overload: The experience of receiving an excessive quantity of information that our brain system cannot fully process.
- Sensory enhancements: Elements that stimulate an audience's senses and break up a presentation into memorable chunks that are more easily understood.

Sensory Enhancements to Overcome Information Overload

Information overload is the experience of receiving an excessive quantity of information that our brain system cannot fully process. If you fail to organize your information into digestible chunks, your audience will quickly reach their capacity to process information.

While we deliver most of the information included in our informative speech through the auditory sensory channel (speaking and listening), engaging other sensory channels, such as visual and kinesthetic (emotion and motion) sensory channels, can make our speeches more successful. Sensory enhancements are elements that stimulate your audience's senses and break up the presentation into memorable chunks that are more easily understood. In this way, sensory enhancements help your audience to overcome information overload by improving their engagement, comprehension, and memory.

Use Sensory Enhancements to Improve Listener Engagement

Your audience will be more engaged if you take the time to understand their needs and tailor your sensory enhancements to meet them. For example, if you are presenting to a group that may have a shorter attention span, such as teenagers or young adults, use visuals with bold pictures and colors and avoid including too much text.

Visual aids offer structure for your information to help audience members follow the flow of your presentation. Audience members are also more apt to pay attention when you incorporate visual and other sensory input.

Engaging anecdotes, stories, quotes, and examples can be considered sensory enhancements because they stimulate your audience's imagination and emotions. Using compelling visual images to reinforce anecdotes, stories, quotes, and examples will help your audience remember and apply the information you're offering them.

Improve Audience Listening Comprehension through Sensory Enhancement

Your audience's listening comprehension can be greatly improved through sensory enhancement and visual aids because these elements allow your audience to process the information twice—first through their auditory sensory channel and then again through their visual sensory channel. For example, if a speaker uses a story to explain a concept and also shows a visual aid related to the story, audience members will process both the story they hear and the story they see.

Improve Audience Memory through Sensory Enhancement

Your audience's ability to remember your presentation can also be improved through sensory enhancements. Audience members are more apt to remember information when it is repeated. However, repeating the same words or phrases to reinforce an idea can quickly become boring. Bored audiences tend to tune out. And tuned out audiences rarely remember what they've heard. When you use sensory enhancement creatively to reinforce your information, your audience will be more likely to stay engaged, receive your ideas, and remember those ideas.

From Concept to Action

When are you most likely to remember information—when you hear the information, when you see the information, when you are emotionally moved by the information, or a combination of these? How can you apply what you know about your own learning preferences to plan your informative speech?

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"Traffic Statistic Data Information Infographic." Pixabay. https://pixabay.com/en/traffic-statistic-data-information-1597342. Accessed 5 December 2018. [CC0]

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