

Help Your Audience Focus

Brief: To hold the audience's attention, a speaker should consider the audience's readiness to perceive, carefully select stimuli, and maintain current awareness.

Learning Objective: Identify and understand how to use strategies for maintaining audience focus.

Key Terms:

- **Stimuli:** Plural of stimulus; something external that elicits or influences a physiological or psychological activity or response.

Strategies to Gain Your Audience's Attention

There are many strategies that you will need to employ to capture and hold the attention of your audience. Most importantly, you must be able to establish and maintain a genuine connection with the people in your audience. When you take the time to think about and plan ways to help your audience listen, your audience will feel respected and will be more willing to give you the gift of listening.

Prepare Your Audience to Listen

During the first 25 to 30 seconds of your speech introduction, your first responsibility is to capture the attention of your audience. If you're successful, you will then be able to direct and focus your audience's attention to the important parts of the speech's message. If you fail to grab your audience's attention from the outset of your speech, your audience won't tune in to what you're saying. In other words, when you're the speaker, it's your job to make sure that your audience is primed to listen.

It's also your job to make sure that conditions in the room are conducive to listening. Whenever possible, eliminate any unnecessary noise and other distractions. You want your audience focused on your speech, rather than what is happening in the surrounding environment.

Select Stimuli for Focus

While delivering your speech, you want your audience to concentrate on your message. To focus your audience's attention, you will need to emphasize important points through changes in the rate, volume, or pitch of your voice, as well as through gestures and other changes in body language.

When you use vocal variety purposely, your audience knows what's important and will direct their attention to those elements. Similarly, your gestures and changes in body language are able to direct their attention to important aspects of your message. This happens, for example, when you point to a visual aid or diagram.

Additional examples include:

- Directing an audience's attention to a particular idea using a quick internal summary of that idea.
- Marking an important idea by using signposts, such as "Now get this..." or "Here is the crucial point that I want you to remember..."

Redirect Attention

If you look out at your audience and see that audience members are glancing at their watches, texting, or focusing on other people around them, you should recognize that you have lost their attention and redirect them back to your message.

To re-gain your audience's attention, try the following:

- Ask a relevant hypothetical question to stimulate thought.
- Ask a provocative question and then request a show of hands to indicate agreement with one of a few possible answers.
- Provide additional, timely examples of a concept or main point in a way that is engaging for the audience.
- Ignite your audience's imagination. The more their senses are stimulated, the more your audience's focus will be on your speech's message.



From Concept to Action

Think of a time when you found a speaker's presentation so interesting that you lost track of time. What strategies did the speaker employ that held your attention? Was the topic especially interesting? Did they use vocal techniques to effectively vary tone, pitch, and volume of their voice? Did they use visual and audio aids to stimulate your senses? Did they seem to be a naturally gifted storyteller? What can you learn from your positive experience that you can incorporate in your speeches?

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

"Angry Body Clock Watch Length Late Standing." Pixabay. <https://pixabay.com/illustrations/angry-body-clock-watch-length-3454428>. Accessed 30 March 2019. [CC BY-SA 3.0]

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