

Impression Management

Brief: In everyday life, as well as in public speaking, we tend to make decisions about how to present ourselves both to match our own self-image and to match our audience's expectations and preferences.

Learning Objective: Understand how to use impression management to positively influence the audience's perceptions.

Key Terms:

- **Impression management:** A process in which people attempt to influence the perceptions of other people about a person, object, or event.
- **Posture:** A type of body movement that conveys information about relationships with others, as well as personality traits, such as confidence, submissiveness, and openness.

Impression Management

Impression management is a process in which people attempt to influence the perceptions of other people about a person, object, or event. Taken to an extreme, impression management can become a means to manipulate and deceive others. However, most of us use impression management in a much less negative way.

Whenever we present information about ourselves to others, such as through the types of clothes we choose to wear or the images we upload to our social media accounts, we—consciously or unconsciously—engage in impression management.

In everyday life, as well as in public speaking, we tend to make decisions about how to present ourselves both to match our own self-image and to match our audience's expectations and preferences.

Attire

How you choose to dress is considered an aspect of non-verbal communication with social significance for the audience. Your clothing and accessories convey non-verbal clues about your personality, background, and financial status. In addition, your clothing style can demonstrate your culture, mood, level of confidence, interests, age, authority, values, and sexual identity.

Your appearance can send a positive or a negative message. For example, wrinkled clothes and messy hair send the message that you don't care. In contrast, a neat appearance suggests that you respect the importance of the occasion.

As a general rule, your attire should be chosen according to the type of audience, the event, and the purpose of the speech. Your audience should be your first consideration while choosing attire. However, self-expression also matters. Though you want to meet the expectations of your audience, you also want to stay true to your own self-image.

Above all, you should be comfortable without appearing over- or under-dressed. If your clothing is physically uncomfortable, your performance will suffer. Additionally, making a fashion statement with flashy jewelry or vibrant prints is not necessarily a good idea, as it can divert the audience's attention, distracting them from the substance of the speech.

Your Posture

If you are speaking to an audience in person, the audience will respond to your posture. Posture is a type of body movement that conveys information to your audience about your relationship with them, as well as about your personality traits, such as confidence, submissiveness, and openness.

If your posture is closed—if you have your arms crossed, your hands clasped in front of your body, or your legs crossed—you will give the impression of detachment, disinterest, and hostility. Your clothing can also signal a closed posture. If you are wearing a buttoned suit or are holding a handbag or a briefcase in front of your body, you will likely give the same impression.

When your posture is open, you communicate a friendly and positive attitude. In an open posture, your feet are spread at a comfortable stance, your head is straight and raised, and your eyes are focused on your audience.

Always keep in mind that your speech is meant to be an extended conversation. Your goal is to make an authentic connection with the members of your audience. As much as possible, use your nonverbal cues to project your friendliest, most confident self.

From Concept to Action

Make your rehearsal a true dress rehearsal by wearing the same clothing that you plan to wear when you deliver your speech. This will let you know ahead of time whether you've chosen an outfit that works. Pants that are too tight, uncomfortable shoes, or jackets that restrict movement can truly cramp your style on speech delivery day.

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