

How to Connect with Your Audience

Brief: Perspective-taking can help speakers effectively adapt their message to the interests, values, beliefs, and language level of their audience.

Learning Objective: Understand how to use the skill of perspective-taking to make meaningful connections with the audience.

Key Terms:

- **Perspective-taking:** Considering how others organize their world cognitively in order to reframe your concepts in a way they will understand.

Perspective-Taking

When you take an audience-centered approach to speech preparation, you focus on the members of your audience and how they will respond to the speech. While preparing your speech, you try to step outside your own perceptual framework to understand the world as it is perceived by members of the audience. This process is called perspective-taking.

Find Common Ground

Through your audience analysis, you will learn about your audience. The more you discover about your audience, the more you will be able to adapt your message to their interests, values, beliefs, and language level.

Throughout this process, it can be helpful to remember that you are on a journey to find common ground in order to identify with your audience. One of the most useful strategies for adapting your topic and message is to use the process of identification. What do you and your audience have in common? And, conversely, how are you different? What ideas or examples in your speech can your audience identify with?

Create a Theoretical, Imagined Audience

Another way to put your perspective-taking into action is to create what is called a theoretical, universal audience. Imagine a composite audience that contains individuals from the diverse backgrounds you have identified in your audience analysis. Next, decide whether or not the content of your speech would appeal to individuals within that audience.

What words or examples will the audience understand and what will they not understand? What terms will you need to define or explain for this audience? How different are the values and opinions you want your audience to accept from the present attitudes and beliefs they may hold?

Encoding and Decoding

Perspective-taking is important to keep in mind as you're crafting the language of your speech. As a public speaker, you will encode your ideas from thoughts into words in an attempt to form a message that you will then deliver to your audience. Your audience members will then attempt to decode what you have said in order to understand it.

To better envision this process, consider the example of encoding and decoding as it applies to the concept of a tree. Say, for example, you live in New England and you are delivering a speech in New England. When you use the word *tree*, you are likely referring to a deciduous tree, such as an oak tree. Your audience is familiar with the same type of trees, so they will likely decode the word *tree* in the way you intended.

If you're from Hawaii, on the other hand, and you are delivering a speech in New England, you may use the word *tree* to refer to a palm tree. When you use the word *tree*, your audience will likely think of a deciduous tree, which is not what you intended. To avoid this, you need to be more precise with your language.



From Concept to Action

Imagine two different audiences, filled with members who are very different from who you are now. For example, you might imagine a group of young children in one group and a group of billionaire businesspeople in another. Based on what you already know or can guess about these groups, imagine in your mind two different composite audiences that contain individuals from each of these groups. Next, choose a possible speech topic. In your imagination, try the topic out on both groups. Decide whether or not the content of your speech would appeal to individuals within each audience. How could you adapt your topic to each audience's unique interests and needs?

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