

## Audience Attitude Towards You and Your Topic

**Brief:** Before stepping up to the podium, consider how an audience might feel about you and your topic.

**Learning Objective:** Understand the factors that contribute to the favorability of your audience toward you and your topic.

**Key Terms:**

- **Credibility:** Reputation impacting one's ability to be believed.
- **Sample:** A subset of a population selected for measurement, observation, or questioning to provide statistical information about the population.

### Favorability of the Speaker

The Roman rhetorician Quintilian suggested that a public speaker should be "a good man speaking well." Quintilian believed public speakers should strive to be morally and ethically good people so that they would be viewed by others as such.

Before you even step up to the podium, consider how your audience might feel about you. What is your reputation? Are you considered a credible source?

Credibility has two key components: trustworthiness and expertise, both of which have objective and subjective components. Trustworthiness is based more on subjective factors, but can include objective measurements such as established reliability. Expertise can be similarly subjectively perceived, but also includes relatively objective characteristics of the source or message (e.g., credentials, certification, or information quality).

### ***Building Popularity***

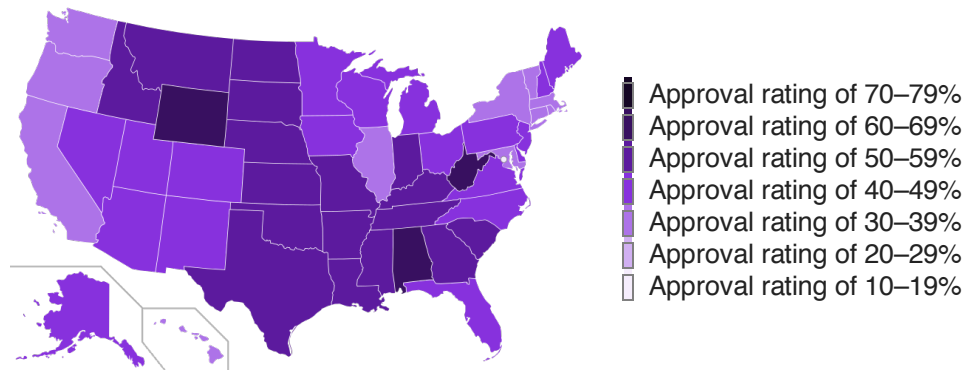
One of the most widely agreed upon theories of popularity asserts that it stems from the perceived value that an individual brings to a group.

In addition to cultivating a positive reputation and personal credibility, studies have shown that certain behaviors can contribute to building that perception of value:

- Expressing and acting in genuine ways
- Focusing on positive energy
- Treating others with respect
- Creating and cultivating connections

## Favorability of Your Topic

Political opinion pollsters report on the attitudes of large groups of people about different topics of national interest. For example, consider the presidential job approval rating. Does the President of the United States have a high or low favorability rating? How does it compare to past presidents? In what regions of the country is it higher or lower?



*Approval rating of President Trump as of March 2019.*

Interest surveys are conducted every day to assess thoughts, opinions, and feelings on all kinds of topics, by phone, mail, via the internet, and sometimes face-to-face on busy street corners. With a representative sample (that is, a sample that is representative of the larger population of interest) one can describe the attitudes of the population from which the sample was drawn. Further, one can compare the attitudes of different populations as well as look for changes in attitudes over time. A good sample selection is key, as it allows one to generalize the findings from the sample to the population, which is the whole purpose of survey research.

If you are speaking about a topic that is currently popular with the media, you are likely to find a variety of surveys to assist you. Be sure to check the credibility of the organization conducting the survey and that the sample size was large enough to get viable information.

If your topic is more local and personal, you may want to collect your own data. You can conduct a simple survey with rating scales to find out exactly how your audience views the topic or thesis for your speech. You might also want to informally data mine by checking your followers or friends who may be similar to your audience; how many "likes" are expressed?

## From Concept to Action

Social media platforms like Facebook have heightened our awareness of how much influence we can have when we "like" something or someone. But, as is so often the case, too much of a good thing isn't always a good thing. Studies show that expressing and acting in genuine ways is essential our popularity. Consider your "liking" behavior. Do you genuinely like everything that you endorse? Or, do you at times "like" something for other reasons—to be polite, to be part of

the group, to get something in return? What do you notice about your “liking” behavior and what do you think the consequences might be?

**OER IMAGE SOURCES:**

“Approval rating of Donald Trump by state – Mar 2019.” Wikimedia Commons.  
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