Chapter Objectives

After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Explain why public speakers must be audience centered.
2. Explain what it means to say that audiences are egocentric.
3. Identify the major demographic traits of audiences.
4. Identify the major situational traits of audiences.
5. Use a questionnaire as a method of audience analysis for classroom speeches.
6. Explain how a speaker can adapt to the audience while preparing the speech and while delivering the speech.

Chapter Outline

I. Good speakers are audience-centered.
   A. They understand that the primary purpose of public speaking is to gain a desired response from their listeners.
   B. They keep three questions in mind as they prepare their speeches:
      1. To whom am I speaking?
2. What do I want the audience to know, believe, or do as a result of my speech?
3. How can I most effectively compose and present my speech to accomplish that aim?
C. They seek to create a bond—what communication scholars call identification—with listeners by emphasizing common values, goals, and experiences.

II. It is important for student speakers to approach their classmates as a real audience.
A. Because the classroom seems like an artificial speaking situation, it is easy for students to lose sight of their classmates as an authentic audience.
B. The best student speakers take their audience seriously and treat their classmates as worthy of their best effort.

III. Good speakers understand the psychology of audiences.
A. A speaker’s task is to make the audience want to pay attention to her or his message.
B. The auditory perception of audiences is always selective.
   1. Everything a speaker says is filtered through a listener’s frame of reference.
   2. Every speech contains two messages—that sent by the speaker and that received by the audience.
C. Audiences are egocentric, paying closest attention to the messages that affect them directly.
D. These psychological principles have two important implications for speakers.
   1. Listeners will judge a speech on the basis of what they already know and believe.
   2. Speakers must take care to relate their messages to an audience’s existing knowledge and beliefs.

IV. The first stage of audience analysis is examining demographic traits of the audience and how they might affect reception of the speech.
A. Demographic audience analysis is a useful tool in understanding audiences, but it needs to be used properly.
   1. When analyzing demographic information about the audience, it is essential to avoid stereotyping.
   2. Demographic audience analysis should always be combined with situational audience analysis.
B. Few things affect a person’s outlook more than her or his age.
C. Gender issues can have a strong impact on how an audience responds to a speech.
D. The religious views of the audience need to be considered.
E. It is important to adapt to the audience on the basis of sexual orientation.
F. It is also important to consider the racial, ethnic, or cultural background of audience members.
G. The group membership of an audience is another important factor to consider.
H. There are also a number of other potentially important demographic variables, including occupation, economic position, education, and place of residence.

V. Another stage of audience analysis is examining features of the audience unique to the speaking situation at hand.
   A. The first factor to consider is the size of the audience.
   B. The second factor to consider is the physical setting of the speech.
   C. The third factor to consider is the audience’s disposition toward the topic.
      1. A speaker needs to assess the audience’s interest in the topic.
      2. A speaker needs to assess the audience’s knowledge about the topic.
      3. A speaker needs to assess the audience’s attitude toward the topic.
   D. The fourth factor to consider is the audience’s disposition toward the speaker.
   E. The fifth factor to consider is the audience’s disposition toward the occasion.

VI. There are several ways to get demographic and situational information about the audience.
   A. For speeches outside the classroom, speakers often make informal inquiries about their audience.
   B. For classroom speeches, students often use audience-analysis questionnaires.
      1. There are three basic types of questions for such questionnaires.
         a. Fixed-alternative questions offer a choice between two or more specific responses.
         b. Scale questions allow for a continuum of answers.
         c. Open-ended questions give maximum leeway in responding.
      2. There are four guidelines for effective audience-analysis questionnaires.
         a. They should be carefully planned to elicit the necessary information.
         b. They should use all three types of questions to get specific and detailed information.
         c. They should be clear and unambiguous.
         d. They should be relatively brief.

VII. Once speakers complete their audience analysis, they use that analysis to adapt their speech to their listeners.
   A. Most of the work of audience adaptation takes place before the speech as part of the preparation process.
      1. A speaker should keep the audience in mind at every stage of speech preparation.
2. A speaker should keep the following questions constantly in mind while preparing the speech.
   a. How is the audience likely to respond to what I will say?
   b. How can I adjust my message to make it as clear and convincing as possible?
3. Adjusting the message to the audience requires that speakers anticipate how listeners will respond and be creative in thinking of ways to adapt.

B. Audience adaptation also takes place during the presentation of the speech.
   1. No matter how hard a speaker works ahead of time, things do not always go smoothly on the day of the speech.
   2. Skillful speakers learn to adapt to these kinds of changes.

Exercises for Critical Thinking  (from text page 117)

1. Advertisers are usually very conscious of their audience. Choose an issue of a popular magazine such as *Time, Newsweek, Sports Illustrated, Vanity Fair, Rolling Stone,* or the like. From that issue select three advertisements to analyze. Try to determine the audience being appealed to in each advertisement, and analyze the appeals (verbal and visual) used to persuade buyers. How might the appeals differ if the ads were designed to persuade a different audience?

   **Discussion:** Because the audience appeal of most magazine advertisements is quite obvious, this exercise usually promotes vigorous class discussion on the principles of audience analysis and adaptation. In addition, it almost always provokes questions about the ethics of audience adaptation. If you use this exercise, be sure to have students bring a copy of their advertisements to class.

2. Below are three general speech topics and, for each, two hypothetical audiences to which a speech might be delivered. For each topic, write a brief paragraph explaining how you might adjust your specific purpose and message according to the demographic characteristics of the audience.

   a. **Topic:** “Data Encryption”

      **Audience #1:** 50% computer science majors, 30% physics majors, 20% fine arts majors

      **Audience #2:** 40% business majors, 40% history majors, 20% computer science majors

      **Discussion:** Audience #1 will likely be more interested in and knowledgeable about the topic than will audience #2. The speaker addressing audience #2 will have to give special attention to gaining attention, to relating the topic to the audience, and to avoiding technical language.