Adapting Before the Speech

Inquire: Intentional Adaptations

Overview
Before you present, it is important to consider who your audience is and what your message to that audience will be. Put careful thought into how your message will reach your intended audience. This should help you decide how best to reach your intended audience, and it may help you understand the impact of your message on unintended audiences. This lesson will cover how to know who your audience is, how to obtain demographic information, how to prepare for job interviews, and what parts of your presentation are able to be adapted.

Big Question: How do you change your message for different audiences?

Watch: Adapting to the Right Audience
As you develop your presentation, it is important not to think only about what to say. Think about how your audience will interpret what you say. That’s where audience adaptation comes in! Audience adaptation is when you change parts of your presentation to make it more appealing to certain people. Before you can adapt to an audience, you need to know who that audience is and the demographics of that audience. Demographics are identifying information such as age or gender. Once you have that information, you can start adapting your presentation accordingly. For instance, you wouldn’t start your speech with a joke about Fortnite for an audience of retirees, just as you wouldn’t want to talk about a Walkman to a group of middle schoolers. Knowing your audience is very important when it comes to building a connection, and it can affect your decisions in choosing your attention getter, audience relation, or credibility statements.

But, audience analysis doesn’t stop after the introduction! You may also decide to adapt your solutions. If your message is intended to persuade an audience to do something, your message should be as specific as possible. If you are talking to middle schoolers, don’t suggest they purchase an item, since most won’t have their own money to buy it. Don’t suggest an Amish audience use Twitter, as they avoid cell phones and computers. Knowing your intentional audience matters.

Take a moment to think about presentations you have watched. How do teachers change their presentations based on the students they teach each year? How do famous people speak if they talk at the Nickelodeon awards? In comparison, how do they speak if hosting Saturday Night Live? Messages change in order to most effectively reach their intended audience. Knowing how to change your message based on who you want it to reach is a vital step in becoming an effective communicator.
Read: Adaptation Before a Presentation

Overview
Practice isn't the only thing to do before a presentation. You should also think about how your intended audience will interact with your presentation, and make changes so they view the presentation more positively. When you hear the word “presentation,” you probably think about speeches in front of a class or at work. However, presentations come in all shapes and sizes. One of the most important presentations in your professional life is a job interview, where you have to present yourself to a potential employer. This lesson will give you tools to adapt your presentation before you speak and will explain how to do that in a job interview as well. You will learn to identify who your audience is, how to get demographic information, what parts of your presentation you should consider changing, and how to prepare for an interview.

Who is Your Audience?
The audience is anyone who receives your message. That sounds vague, but it really is that simple. Your audience just needs to be someone who receives your message. Though, that doesn’t mean everyone who receives it is your intended audience. There are intentional audiences, the people you direct your message to, and unintentional audiences, those who receive your message when you did not deliberately choose to send it to them. Your intended audience is the group of people, or the person, you adapt your message for. You want them to receive your message, and you want them to receive it in the most effective way possible. Your unintentional audience can impact your message, but you would adapt to them during the speech, not before it.

How to Obtain and Use Demographic Information
In order to adapt to your intended audience, you need to know who is in your intended audience. So, gather demographic information about your intended audience. Demographics are identifying information such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. Demographics can be gathered in two different ways: polls and observations. Polls can be sent out as questionnaires to gather responses from an audience without you being present. This can be useful if you are presenting to an audience that you do not have the ability to visit in person before your speech. Gathering observations requires you to look around and see who is in the audience. Observations require access to your audience before your presentation.

Once you have the audience’s demographic information, it is important to take advantage of it. You should use the information to change your speech so that it is more favorable or more easily understood by the people that will be in your audience.

What can Change for Your Audience?
There are a few parts of your presentation that you can easily change based on your audience analysis. You can change your attention getter, audience relation, speaker credibility, and solutions, if you have them. Your attention getter should be specific to your audience, because not all people or audiences pay attention to the same things. In the same way, your audience relation statements should be specific to the group of people in front of you. Your credibility to speak to an audience also changes based on whom you are talking to. Finally, if you have solutions, those should adapt to your audience as well, since you want your audience to be able to engage with your solutions.
Preparing for an Interview

Audience adaptation is a skill that doesn’t seem to have many uses outside of a classroom. However, it is a skill that will help you in unexpected ways! In your professional life, the most applicable is using audience adaptation to make job interviews more successful. There are three things you should do to adapt for an interview. First, learn about the position. You want to know what the job entails as well as some background information about the company you would be working for. This information helps you cater your message to match the skills and traits necessary for the job. Once you know what the job is, you should update your resume for the position. Your resume should be as specific as possible to ensure your message is effectively communicated from the very beginning. It’s a good idea not to send the same resume out twice and to make changes for each potential employer based on the job. Finally, once you are at the interview, you should tailor the answers you give to the specific job. Also, be sure to convince your prospective employer that you are the best person for the job.

Reflect Poll: Easy Adaptations

Which part of a presentation is easiest to adapt to different audiences?

- attention-getter
- audience relation
- speaker credibility
- solutions

Expand: Interview Tactics

Overview

Interview skills are vital to succeed in today’s business world. This section will give you skills to help in future interviews. At the end of the day, a job interview is just a presentation where you are informing and persuading a potential employer that you are the best hire for the job. You become the topic of the presentation, and the better you adapt to your audience and the employer, the better your chances are of getting a call back.

Interviewing 101

The first thing you need to understand about an interview is that you are selling yourself. Convince the interviewer that you are the best person for the job. The more you do to convince them, and the less they have to ask, the better. Always offer up information that is relevant to the job and makes you look the best. Don’t just offer your strengths; explain why they make you the best candidate. Instead of giving your biggest weakness, tell how you manage that weakness or solve the problem it causes. You want to stand out at every opportunity.

Second, understand why prospective employers ask certain questions. While they do care about weaknesses, interviewers ask that question to see the candidate’s problem-solving skills. Each question is asked to measure your ability to perform the necessary skills for the job and to assess your interpersonal skills. It’s okay take a moment to think about your answer before giving it. Take the time to understand the question and the interviewer’s motivation for asking it. Then, you can give your best answer.
Finally, make sure to answer the question. Don’t overthink your answer and forget to give the information that was asked for. There can be more than one reason interviewers ask questions, but they do want to know the specific answer to the questions asked.

The easiest way to do these things is to practice and prepare before an interview. Look up a list of common interview questions and run through these three steps for a few of them. Go into the interview having prepared answers and knowing what you want to tell the interviewer about yourself.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings
An article providing a list of common questions and the kinds of answers to give

- Link to resource: https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-answer-the-31-most-common-interview-questions

An article providing suggestions on how to prepare for job interviews

- Link to resource: https://www.experisjobs.us/exp_us/en/career-advice/20-tips-job-interviews.htm

An article providing considerations to make when adapting your presentation to different audiences

- Link to resource: https://www.comm.pitt.edu/audience-adaptation

Lesson Glossary

**audience:** anyone who receives your message

**intentional audiences:** people you direct your message to on purpose

**unintentional audiences:** people who receive your message when you did not deliberately choose to send it to them

**demographics:** identifying information such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, gender, or religion

Check Your Knowledge

1. Audience adaptation only matters for speeches.
   a. True
   b. False

2. You should prepare answers for interview questions beforehand.
   a. True
   b. False

3. Your message can reach audiences you never intended it to.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:
Citations

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