

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Audience name (brief) _____

Topic (general) _____

Note: Not all presentations or audiences require going to these depths to define your listeners. Some do. Use these questions as a guide to help you determine what is important and what is not. In general, I would suggest doing more research and critical thinking about your audience than you may think is necessary. Understanding their inner workings is truly valuable insight.

I like to think of identifying an audience on three levels:

1: The most basic is simple demographics. What things do they have in common? How do they differ? Categories like these are the things we all think about when we look at an audience. These are obviously important to know so that we can keep our comments relevant to their world and their experiences.

- Age
- Workgroup
- Nationality
- Education
- Outside Organizations
- Marital status
- Gender
- Location
- Children
- Employer
- Race
- Disabilities
- Industry
- Religion
- Social status
- Occupation
- Politics
- Income
- Other _____

Notes: _____

2: Controversies, trends, and recent events. Next, we should explore what portions of our topic are critical to them and how should we address them. Controversies, trends, recent company, industry, community or world events fall into this category. These ideas should be considered to be a part of our content. Some will be appropriate for us to address. Some will not. Still we should know about as many of them as possible.

3: Inner, personal concerns. What do they worry about? What keeps them up at night? These can be openly expressed thoughts such as “How are we going to improve our quarterly sales results?” or they can be unexpressed concerns like “Will I still have a job tomorrow?” or “Am I a qualified to be a member of my team?” Many of these inner concerns may not be suitable for our presentation, but they will be good to know. What makes our audience members tick? What are their deepest needs?

How to do some basic research

Researching into your audience is like peeling an onion. The more you understand and peel back each layer, the more you will see the next level.

Starting with **Number 1. Simple Demographics.** Begin by brainstorming as much as you know. Then use basic tools like Google to explore their company, their industry, and any of the other areas in our basic list that are relevant.

Diving into area number 2. **Controversies, trends, and recent events** requires some different strategies:

- Connect with your meeting or other group contact. Ask them what topics will be on your audience’s mind. What are their common needs? What areas are controversial? What should you definitely address? What should you avoid?
- Contact audience members. Ask your planner or other group contact if you should connect with members of their group. They may be able to give you names and contact information of 5 to 10 people – either rank and file members or possibly leaders. Your contact should also be able to suggest questions you can ask and areas to address or avoid.
- Listen carefully to the words they use, the experiences they talk about and the stories they tell. These may all be very useful for actual presentation content. If you decide to use these nuggets of gold, be sure to ask for permission both from the person you are getting them from and from your contact. Don’t skip this step. You could be stepping into a potentially embarrassing situation. Additionally, make sure you give credit to your source. Using their stories and giving them credit for it will help you be the trusted expert in their world.

Exploring Number 3: Inner, personal concerns requires all of the insights you will gain from the items above plus some deep empathetic thinking. Ask yourself some basic questions about their fears and doubts. You may find that their anxieties are not all that different from yours or everyone else’s. Much of this content won’t be suitable for you to discuss openly in your presentation. But understanding our audience’s deep thoughts will give you, the presenter, a guide as to how you can become their trusted guide and therefore be ultimately effective with your presentation.