



CHAPTER 13

Audience Interaction

“Be everywhere, do everything and never fail to astonish the customer.”
— *Macy’s motto*

One-on-one conversations are highly interactive experiences; however, many public-speaking presentations are a one-way street. There are no requirements for listeners’ response other than smiles or knowing nods of the head. As a result, some listeners may drift-off to the land of Nod returning only when they hear the speaker say, “In conclusion....”

There is a solution. Get the audience involved. Go beyond rhetorical questions and shift your listeners’ minds into gear. There are many ways to mentally involve an audience. For example: ask them to raise their hands, write responses on hand-outs, call out a predetermined word or shake hands with those standing next to them.

The following modules provide practice in several interactive techniques. Participants are given the opportunity to experience the power that comes from: (a) asking questions of individuals in the audience, (b) generating humor from audience responses, (c) asking listeners to validate the speaker’s comment, (d) requesting several listeners to tell the rest of the group what they think or feel, and (e) giving listeners a short break to rest their *gluttii maximii*.

Practice Modules and Objectives

- 13-73 Audience Research**
LOW
Summarizing audience opinion using a flip chart.
- 13-74 Questions and Answers**
LOW
Learning to field questions from the audience.
- 13-75 Instrument Approach**
LOW
Practicing the art of giving instructions.
- 13-76 I Object**
MED
Handling the listener who verbally disagrees.
- 13-77 Establishing Rapport**
MED
“Tricks of the trade” that build audience rapport.
- 13-78 Person To Person**
MED
Using classic audience interaction techniques.
- 13-79 Audience Enthusiasm** *HIGH*
Orchestrating an audience response.

13-73

Low

Audience Research

Building Blocks: *Obtaining audience opinion and using a flip chart or white board as a visual aid and a recording device.* Speakers must often determine audience beliefs concerning a specific topic. This module gives practice in this interactive process.

Overview

What does the audience have to say? This module gives participants the opportunity to find out by exploring questions that are within the everyday experiences of the audience.

Example assignment: What is the difference between a professional and an amateur? The participant puts this question to the audience and notes audience opinions on a flip chart. Participants conclude by summarizing the audiences' overall position.

Ideas For Opening Remarks

- Describe how to use audience interaction to get audience attention, to obtain information, to get consensus and to solve a problem.
- Describe the specific goal of this module, i.e., to summarize audience opinion on a specific question.
- Discuss the basic ways to use flip charts or white boards (see 12-68, "Simple Visual Aids").

Putting It All Together

Do not ask exotic questions that only a rocket scientist can answer. Also avoid controversial subject matter or material that some might find offensive.

Some good questions might be: How can individuals control their anger? What are the basic components of success? What are the basic requirements for diagnostic listening? Can we legislate morality?

Briefly review the use of flip charts or white boards. If time is short or visual aids are not available, they can be excluded. In this situation, provide participants with paper and pencil for personal notes.

The Session

1. Give opening comments that describe the importance of audience involvement and challenge the group to use audience-interaction techniques from time to time.
2. If a flip chart or white board is used, demonstrate how to summarize an idea with a few words. Stress the need to write large enough so that individuals in the back row can read material.
3. Present questions to participants and ask them to use flip charts to note audience response. Have participants conclude with a brief summary of audience opinion.
4. Some evaluation criteria:
 - Did participants capture audience consensus or lack of consensus?
 - Were participants able to note ideas on the flip chart or white board using a few words?
 - Did participants manage audience response by acknowledging as many individuals as possible?

Special Consideration: Obtain opinions from all parts of the room. Don't limit Q&A to a given segment of the room or to selected individuals.

Questions and Answers

13-74
Low

Building Block: *Answering questions from the audience.* This practice module gives participants practice in the art of questions and answers (Q&A). It is designed to utilize the actual expertise of the participant.

Overview

The audience is asked to imagine that the participants have just finished giving a speech and are ready to field questions. The session leader prepares the audience by giving them imaginary speech titles, in turn, and a brief outline of the material the speaker just covered. Participants then field questions from the audience.

Ideas For Opening Remarks

- Mention fact that many presentations can be improved by including a question and answer (Q&A) period after the speech.
- Review some of the basic rules for a Q&A: (a) make sure everyone in the audience has heard the question being asked, (b) don't hesitate to ask for clarification if a question is unclear, (c) restate a listener's question when necessary, (d) stay on target and don't introduce unnecessary side comments, and (e) be quick to admit you don't have an answer and offer to find an answer after the session.

Putting It All Together

Determine areas of participants' expertise before presenting the module. Participants' knowledge may come from formal training, the work place, hobbies, etc. Design a customized, simulated speech title for each participant that

incorporates their special knowledge. For example, if a participant is a nurse, a speech title could be First Aid Procedures That Everyone Should Know. If a participant is a real estate agent, a speech title could be How To Buy A Home You Will Love Forever. Write titles that suggest questions to the audience even though they haven't heard an actual speech.

To further the feeling that a speech has just concluded, design your introductory comments as a springboard for questions, e.g., "Thank you Diane for your presentation on first aid. You have covered a wide range of material that included (a) how to administer CPR, and (b) the first thing to do in an emergency. Are there questions from the audience?"

The Session

1. Address the importance of Q&A. Ask the audience to imagine that each participant has just finished a speech and is now ready for Q&As.
2. Introduce participants in turn and give their customized speech title.
3. Some evaluation criteria:
 - Did participants follow the general rules outlined in "Ideas" above?
 - Were participants able to zero-in on audience questions?
 - Were participants willing to say, "I don't know but I'll find out?"

Special Consideration: Caution participants to keep their answers short and on target.

13-75

Low

Instrument Approach

Building Block: *Practice in the art and science of giving precise instructions.* This practice module focuses on the frequent need to give precise instructions to an audience.

Overview

Participants assume the role of air traffic controllers as members of the audience “pilot” their aircraft through hazardous terrain. The destinies of the blindfolded pilots are determined by the accuracy of the participants instructions as the pilots wend their way between mountains and out of canyons.

The objective of this session is to demand precise instructions from participants while using the performance of the pilots as immediate feedback regarding the precision of their instructions.

Ideas For Opening Remarks

Review the “Ideas” presented in module 14-82, “Here’s How It’s Done.”

Putting It All Together

Decide what course the blindfolded audience members (the pilots) will fly under the verbal guidance of participants. Build a flight path that contains simulated hazards such as mountains, high tension wires, Empire State Building, etc. Outline hazard areas with masking tape and label an imaginary obstacle with appropriately named posters. Do not place any obstacle in the pilot’s path that can cause a fall or collision.

To make the course relatively difficult and to challenge the precision of the participants instructions, design the course so that precise

instructions have to be given to avoid obstacles. For example, place some obstacles so close together that pilots have to turn sideways to get through. Have all the pilots leave the room while setting up the course or change obstacles while a pilot is blindfolded.

The Session

1. Outline the importance of good verbal instructions. Describe session strategy.
2. Select the audience members who act as the blindfolded pilots.
3. Give control to each participant in turn. Advise pilots to fly slow. Always monitor pilot safety.
4. Give award to the participant-pilot team with the fewest number of crashes, i.e., violating a defined hazard area by rubbing up against the boundary tape or walking into a hazardous area.
5. Some additional criteria:
 - Did participants issue clear, concise instructions that were free of ambiguity?
 - Were the participants calm and in full control of their emotions?
 - Which pilot-participant team flew the most precise course with the fewest crashes in the shortest time?
 - What made some instructions clearer than others?

Special Consideration: Assign a safety observer to accompany the pilot. Do not design a course that could cause injury due to stumbling or collision.

I Object

13-76
Med

Building Block: *Handling the disagreeable listener who objects to what the speaker is saying.* Aircraft pilots practice emergency procedures to regain control of the aircraft. Public speakers should practice an emergency procedure called *controlling the disagreeable listener*.

Overview

Call this module planned mayhem. Before convening this session, the session leader distributes slips of paper to selected members of the audience that contain scripted objections such as: “Just a minute! What did you really mean when you said...?” or, “Wait! You can’t be serious about all this stuff!”

The session leader then gives impromptu assignments to participants in turn. While a participant is giving his or her presentation, an audience member with a scripted objection stands up and objects to what has just been said. The participant must acknowledge the objection by smoothing over the interruption as best as he or she can.

Ideas For Opening Comments

- Discuss the possibility of an “I Object” response from an audience member and the need to be mentally ready, i.e., have a coping strategy.
- Review ways a speaker can handle various objections. For example: (a) clarify, (b) make corrections if misunderstood, (c) acknowledge the listener’s perspective, (d) make a humorous comment, or (e) agree to speak with them after the presentation.

Putting It All Together

Design or select questions that require participants to take a stand on some topic.

With questions in hand, invent some general objections for your audience role players. Only one objection is necessary for each impromptu participant. Print the scripted objections on slips of paper and hand them out to your audience role players. Ask the role players to pretend that they are truly angered by what has just been said. Allow the role player to choose when they want to object.

If appropriate, an objection can take the form of something a little more explosive such as, “I’ve never heard such baloney in all my life!” (Bang fist on the table and leave the room.)

The Session

1. Distribute printed objections to selected members of the audience and ask them to role-play objectors.
2. Give opening comments and suggest ways that your participants can acknowledge and respond to objections from the audience.
3. Give participants their assignments and let the scenarios play out.
4. Some evaluation criteria:
 - Were participants able to think on their feet, subsequently defusing the verbal assault?
 - Did participants stay calm, obeying the dictum don’t let ’em see you sweat?
 - Did participants’ remain gracious and in control?

Special Consideration: Stay away from emotional topics (religion, politics and sex) that might cause hurt feelings.

13-77

Med

Establishing Rapport

Building Block: *Establishing a sense of closeness (rapport) between the speaker and the audience.* This practice module offers an opportunity to rehearse several techniques professional speakers use to establish rapport between the speaker and the audience.

Overview

This module lowers the barrier between speaker and audience through the use of a few simple techniques.

After opening comments, participants are given their speaking assignments and are instructed to: (1) begin their response standing behind the lectern, (2) step from behind the lectern as they continue their presentation, (3) move into the audience (if practical), and (4) return to the lectern for final comment. Participants can be instructed to use additional techniques as described below.

Ideas For Opening Remarks

- Discuss the psychological distance between speaker and audience and how it can be reduced by removing the barrier effect of a lectern.
- Describe and illustrate several ways speakers can work with and without a lectern. For example, (a) remove the lectern, or (b) use the lectern as a starting point by stepping away from the lectern for a moment and then walking into the audience.
- Discuss other techniques such as: (a) taking off a jacket, (b) rolling up sleeves, and (c) walking up to individuals in the audience. (See Module 13-78, “Person To Person” for more ideas.)

Putting It All Together

Prepare opening comments with examples that show how to use techniques that increase rapport.

Select speaking assignments that encourage interaction between the speaker and the audience. Here are some examples: For a golfer, “What are some guidelines for a powerful and consistent golf swing?” For a tennis player, “What is the proper way to follow through with a tennis stroke?”

Encourage participants to demonstrate what they say, e.g., show a golf swing or a backhand.

The Session:

1. Discuss how to minimize the distance between the speaker and the audience and how to approach the audience both physically and mentally.
2. Give assignments. Rearrange the room so the speaker can move away from the lectern.
3. Some evaluation criteria:
 - Were participants able to shed the security blanket of the lectern without excessive anxiety?
 - Did the speakers’ movement seem in keeping with their content?
 - Were any innovative techniques used that increased audience rapport?

Special Consideration: Allow novice participants to become accustomed to leaving the security of the lectern by having them step away from the lectern several times during their presentation.

Person to Person

13-78
Med

Building Block: *Introducing speakers to one-on-one techniques that can be used with many audiences.* Teach some audience interaction techniques that inject a sense of excitement and capture audience attention.

Overview

Participants get the opportunity to shed their bashfulness by making a direct connection with the audience.

The session leader begins by reviewing the psychological power of direct interaction with the audience. Each participant then receives, in turn, a topic to discuss and a one-on-one assignment such as, “Walk into the audience and ask an audience member a direct question.”

Ideas for Opening Comments

- Describe the benefits of audience interaction, (forces attention, is entertaining and creates a sense of personal interest).
- Some one-on-one ideas:
 - Give an audience two options and ask the question, What’s better, this or that?
 - Ask the audience, “Who has ever had this experience?”
 - Approach an individual audience member, ask her name and have her read an item in the speaker’s hand.
 - Ask the name of an audience member; when they have given you their name, follow-up by asking them, “Would you agree with me that...?”
 - Ask audience a yes-or-no question and have them raise their hands to indicate their answers.

— Ask the audience to repeat a word or a numerical sum. Remind the audience that they need to repeat something at least seven times before they are likely to remember.

Putting It All Together

The session leader’s job is to select an activity and then prepare questions that make it easy for participants to carry out an audience-interaction assignment. If time allows, the session leader can ask the audience to recall similar techniques they have experienced while attending a seminar or sales meeting. These can be summarized on a white board or flip chart and used as assignments for this practice module.

The Session

1. Present opening comments and give an example.
2. Give each participant, in turn, an audience-interaction assignment and a question.
3. Some evaluation criteria:
 - How smoothly did participants work their assignments into their assigned questions?
 - Was it done in a way that did not embarrass audience members?
 - How did participants return comments to audience responses?

Special Consideration: Choose topics that that make it easy for participants to carry out their audience-interaction assignments.

13-79
High

Audience Enthusiasm

Building Block: *Orchestrating verbal responses from the audience on the speaker's cue.* This practice module focuses on a procedure that is guaranteed to involve the audience while generating considerable humor at the same time.

Overview

This technique can be applied to many different kinds of material but it is particularly applicable to motivational topics.

The session leader asks participants to select a word that they want the audience to shout out when signaled to do so. For example, if a participant's topic is enthusiasm, a participant could ask everyone to shout "Enthusiasm" every time he or she points at the audience.

This kind of audience-interaction technique energizes many presentations and is always entertaining. It also serves as reinforcement to the audience and requires the audience to listen to what is being said.

Ideas For Opening Remarks

- Highlight the usefulness of audience interaction techniques. Include advantages such as focusing attention, reinforcement through repetition, novelty effect, group response, entertainment and humor.
- Introduce the specific technique used for this session, i.e., audience calls out a specific word when cued by the speaker. Demonstrate by giving a mini-presentation that incorporates an example audience response.

Putting It All Together

Select speaking assignments that lend themselves to this particular technique. Some example topics include: You Gotta Have Enthusiasm, Inch-by-Inch Everything's a Cinch, Dream a Dream and Don't Throw Out the Baby With the Bath Water.

Recommend a word for audience response. For example: "Sell!" "Believe!" "Right On!" "Why Not?" "Yes!"

Allow participants to choose their own words if they wish to do so. If a participant has a topic he or she would like to use in lieu of an assigned topic, encourage its use.

The Session

1. Make opening comments and include a brief demonstration of the technique.
2. Ask the audience to give their full support by sounding off.
3. Make assignments and suggest an audience response.
4. Some evaluation criteria:
 - Did the speakers give clear instructions to the audience?
 - Did the audience give enthusiastic support to the speakers?
 - Did participants smoothly blend audience response into their presentations?

Special Consideration: Speakers must give clear instructions to the audience concerning what to say and when to say it. It is a good idea to rehearse with audiences before beginning a presentation.