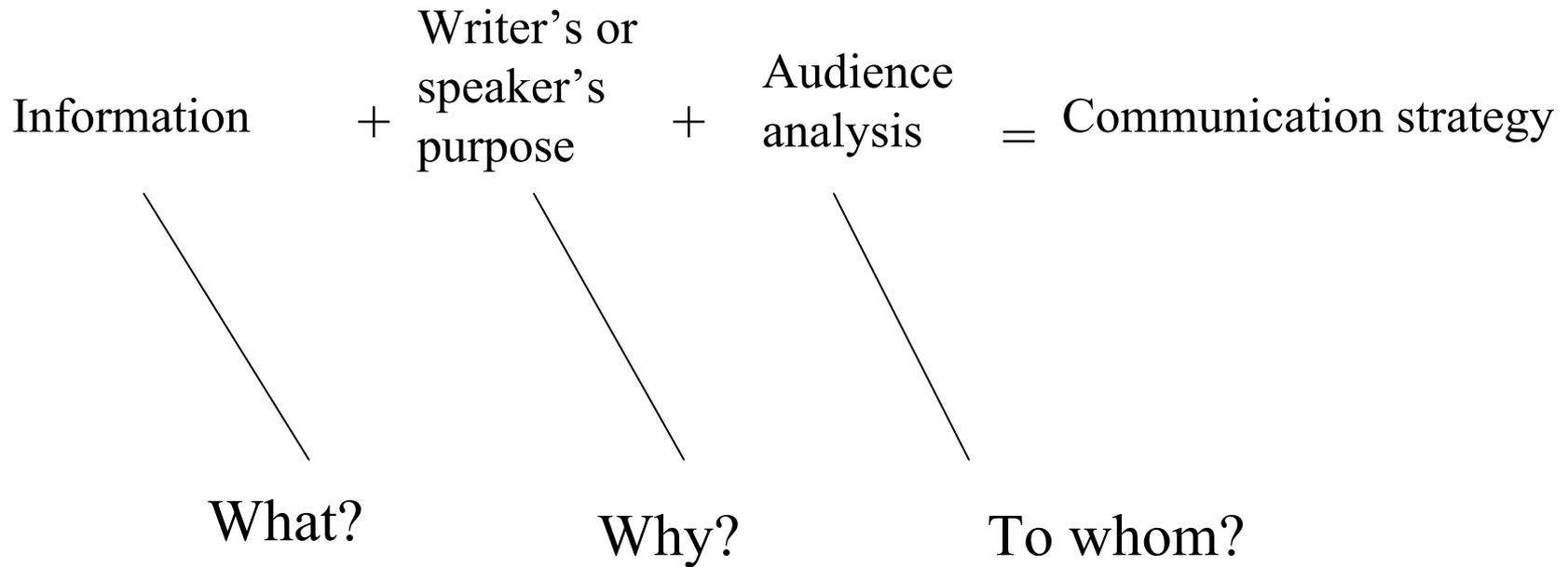


How writers and speakers plan communication strategy

Audience analysis skills



Audience analysis elements

- Know four key facts about readers and listeners.
- Consider the level of technical expertise of your audience.
- Understand why they are reading.

then. . . plan communication strategy and information organization.

4 key facts about how readers and listeners absorb information¹

- An audience creates meaning bit by bit and reacts moment by moment.
- An audience is influenced
 - by surroundings,
 - by beliefs and values,
 - by prior experiences,
 - by roles and responsibilities.
- An audience has finite resources for comprehension.
 - i.e. The energy that it takes to focus, to decipher language or symbols reduces the ability to comprehend.
- An audience absorbs information visually as well as textually.

Readers and listeners = different levels of technical expertise ²

- Experts (general and specific)
 - General experts: extensive knowledge of a field but may be unfamiliar with specific details in a sub-specialty.
 - Specific experts: extensive knowledge of a field and specific knowledge about a sub-specialty.
- Technicians
 - People who construct, operate, and fix objects and systems.
- Decision-makers, managers
 - People who make choices, implement plans, administer budgets, manage resources and people.
- Laypeople
 - People who don't have the specific knowledge of an expert or a technician.

Technical level= different purposes in reading/listening

- Experts
 - maintain and expand expertise; evaluate a document's validity or credibility; obtain specific answers to their own research
- Technicians and other support staff
 - learn how to perform a task; to solve a problem; to learn about new devices and procedures; absorb knowledge helpful to their tasks
- Decision-makers, managers
 - to make a decision, to assess current situation, to maintain their level of expertise; to evaluate projects and employees
- Laypeople
 - to make decisions as a citizen, consumer, and investor; to learn how to do something; to expand general knowledge; to become an expert

Consider demographics.

- Age, sex
- International or ethnic identity
- Educational level
- Values
- Political position
- Economic level
- Reading style/graphic style
- Affinity group

Think about context or current situation, too.

- Are your readers/listeners from other cultures or ethnic backgrounds?
- Economic situation of your audience?
- Political situation of your audience?

Information organization + choice of communication form = strategy

- Information organization: when data is organized into a pattern that makes sense to the reader.
 - Sequence: where the reader needs to begin
 - Density: the level of technical detail
 - Rate: the speed at which the technical details are presented

Form of communication

- The choice of communication form is based on the conventions in your field and your audience analysis.
 - E.g. A group of laypeople might not use a technical report but would find a press release or brochure useful.
 - But an expert would not prefer the press release or brochure but would want to see the technical report.

Quick review

- 4 facts about how an audience absorbs information
- Different levels of technical expertise
- Purposes in reading
- Demographics of audience
- Different forms of communication appeal to different audiences

Audience analysis scenario #1: You are an engineer in charge of a research project that has developed a new process that assesses which components of the new gas turbine engine are useful to spend R & D money on and which are not. This allows a more strategic use of your company's R & D dollars. You are invited to present your project to the CEO and Board of Trustees. You are talking about thermodynamic entropy when you observe that the CEO looks bored and the trustees are falling asleep.

Your research is sound, but what is making this presentation so unsuccessful? Can you rescue this presentation? How? How can you be sure that future opportunities won't produce the same results?

Audience analysis scenario #2: You are the CEO of a company that has developed a new material to be used in the transparent canopy of the F-15. It is more durable and lighter weight than the material currently used. You've won a DoD contract. A U.S. Senator from your state arranges to hold a press conference. The mayor of the city will be there, too. There will be newspaper and television press. Several DoD officials will attend along with several of your engineering colleagues.

Where do you start? What do you need to do to prepare? What are the levels of technical expertise involved? Why is the senator there? What roles do your colleagues play? Is the press essential or not? The mayor? Explain your reasons.

Audience analysis scenario #3: You are the lead engineer on a project to develop an interferometer to be deployed in space. This device will assist in deep space mapping. The work has gone well, but it becomes clear that the project cannot be successfully completed at the budget for which it was approved. The scope of the project is larger than you'd anticipated, and this means not only more money but also more time.

You must go before a NASA committee. What do you need to know about this group to prepare? What will they care most about? How can you persuade them to approve more money and more time for the project?

Audience analysis scenario #4: You are creating a presentation to be given to a venture capitalist whom you want to persuade to invest \$750,000 in your company's haptic feedback glove, a device that provide force feedback to an operator as s/he grasps a remote object.

Ms. Smith brings with her several members of her team. They plan to spend two to three hours with you, maybe more. What roles and responsibilities might these people have? What will their priorities be? What professional backgrounds might they have?

What's your strategy? Why?

Audience analysis scenario #5: The launch director sends you to a meeting with a group of Sierra Club administrators. These representatives of this international environmental organization are concerned about the possibility that your satellite's radioactive power source may have a negative environmental impact should the satellite be destroyed in the launch phase.

What do you need to know about this group? What will your strategy?

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