

SCIENCE COMMUNICATION COURSE PART II

The Target Audience – Who Do I Want to Address?

If you begin a communication project such as a talk, a blog, a YouTube channel, or the like, you should begin by putting a lot of thought into which audience it is that you want to reach. Your goal as well as your content will both determine the factors that will define your target audience. The following aspects are almost always important:

Prior Knowledge about the Topic

Age

Level of Education

Use of Mass Media and or Social Media

Interests

The following is a list of other possible factors that might define a target audience:

gender, marital status, religion, values, illnesses, (political) opinions, motivation, needs, nationality, fears, hopes, traffic behavior, hobbies, and more.

I urge you to think carefully about which factors of your planned communication content are significant for your target audience.

The Persona Method

The so-called persona method can be particularly helpful for the development of a communication strategy that is appropriate for large heterogeneous target audiences. It entails creating fictitious people that can be a member of your target audience. It is important that these personas do not embody ideals, but that they present at least minor challenges for your communication. If raven researcher Rosalie is planning an open house at her institute, for example, she could create the persona Renata, who is an amateur bird watcher and photographer: Renata would be a very idealized persona in this example as she has a lot of interest in birds and would have a great deal of prior knowledge about ravens. A persona who could present more of a challenge is Ralf, a gamer who is only reluctantly accompanying Renata to the open house and would rather be sitting in front of his computer than learning about ravens of all things. Maybe he is even quite annoyed by Renata's passion for birds? Raven researcher Rosalie will have to come up with something to get Ralf

interested in her ravens. The following is an example of what Ralf's persona profile could look like:

EXAMPLE Persona: Ralf, 34 years old, computer scientist

Profession:	System administrator for an insurance company
Marital status:	Has been in a relationship with bird lady Renata for 4 years
Interests:	Computer games (especially those with medieval themes) Technology of all kinds Medieval markets (that's where he met Renata)
Media:	Reads MIT Technology Review and some tech blogs, finds it relaxing to listen to audio books
Favorite TV show:	Game of Thrones
Health:	Slightly overweight but otherwise relatively healthy, he is a foodie and enjoys cooking without thinking too much about whether it's healthy or not, he hates exercising but enjoys going to the countryside with Renata but is annoyed if she spends too much time searching for birds.
Temperament:	Reserved and even shy, he is relaxed and doesn't like too much stress and avoids situations with too many people.
Motivation:	He doesn't want to lose Renata and would do pretty much anything to please her
Apartment:	He lives in a 3-bedroom apartment with Renata, grows Herbs on their balcony for his cooking adventures.
Traffic behavior:	Usually rides public transit because it's easier
Prior Knowledge:	He has picked up a few things about birds in general from his girlfriend, but otherwise doesn't care that much about them

Ralf's persona could be complimented with any number of details. But Rabea already knows what kind of content would win Ralf over: He would certainly be interested why ravens in particular play such an important role in Game of Thrones and which raven myths and sagas served as models for their role. That could surely be linked to the real characteristics of these clever birds as they are studied at the institute. Ralf might also be interested in the technology that raven researchers use to observe ravens in the wild. And Ralf would probably be happy to get something tasty to eat at the food stand at the open house.

TIPS AND TRICKS:

When you develop your own personas for your communication project you should use factors that define your target audience. Give your personas names, draw them or look for pictures on the internet of people that correspond to the types of personas. In the case of very large communication projects with a very heterogeneous target audience, it may be helpful to create multiple personas. Also be aware that most people are multidimensional and capable of seeing beyond the end of their noses. So, for example, the fact that someone has never read a comic book doesn't mean that this person wouldn't be interested in research that focuses on comic books.

Reaching your target audience

Specific strategies of how to approach your target audience often depend on your content and the media you are using. There are, however, a few basic tips that you can use in almost any case:

TIPS:

1. Present yourself as a person and not as an expert or teacher!
2. Figure out what you have in common with your target audience and build on that!
3. You should give the opportunity to ask questions if you have a live or virtual audience and ask the audience questions that they should answer for you.
4. Figure out what your target audience's relationship is to your topic and elaborate on that aspect.
5. Meet your audience where they are. If there are common prejudices, opinions or (outdated) general knowledge about your topic, you should talk about this from the outset.
6. Think about ways you could surprise or provoke your target audience: that will for sure get their attention.
7. The human brain is hardwired for stories, so anecdotes are an easy way to get the attention of your target audience.

TASKS:

1. Define your target audience: Which factors are important for your topic?
2. Create a persona that could be a member of your target audience: Choose a name, draw them, or create an image by using an AI.
3. How would you like approach your persona? Imagine you are about to give a talk about your topic and your persona is in the audience. Use the tips and write an introduction for this talk.

Links and background material:

Science with Society – Interacting with Lay People: You can learn a lot about the attitude how to approach and interact with a lay audience from this video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LSoHmoEqhw&t=1s>

Science with Society - Opening the black box of science:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9u8v6CuZ3G4&t=12s>

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