

## 12 Ways To Annoy The Audience

by Ann Bloch

Speakers have all heard advice on how to deal with annoying audiences. Have they ever considered ways they might be annoying audiences?

1. **Introduction.** Make the introduction lengthy and comprehensive. Include all your academic degrees, all your clients' initials (IBM, AT&T, etc.), and all the foreign countries you've spoken in. Require your introducer to read every word verbatim.

*Solution:* Include all your credentials in the printed stuff beforehand. Once the occasion arrives, don't mention them. Focus instead on details that help connect you with the audience now. Of course you can include in the introduction awards or other achievements relevant to your speech and to the audience.

2. **Introducer.** Stress the personal relationship between the introducer and the speaker. Reminisce about old times. Shower each other with adjectives such as "incredible human being," "wonderful person," "my great friend," "funniest man you've ever heard." Hug each other several times. The audience may feel left out because they don't care about your shared experiences or your esteem for each other. The introducer's role is to set the stage for the members of the audience and connect them with the speaker.

3. **Greeting.** Speaker says, "Good morning." Audience responds, "Good morning." Speaker chides audience, "Oh, come on. You can do better than that." Audience dutifully repeats, louder, "Good morning." Speaker accepts, "That's better." When a speaker demands enthusiasm before it has been earned, the audience may withdraw. Speakers who accept whatever level of warmth the audience offers can raise the level of enthusiasm with the speech.

4. **Opening.** Begin with trite remarks such as "It is a privilege to be here" or "I am honored to be here." Include details of the tribulations you endured to be here today. Slowly build up to the topic you're here to speak about to give the audience time to settle in and get used to you. As a consequence, you'll probably run out of time. Patricia Fripp said, "If you can't say something worthwhile in 30 seconds, you don't deserve 30 minutes." And Lou Heckler has claimed, "In my seminars, the first minute counts."

5. **Time.** Mention frequently how little time you've been allotted for your pithy topic and how much more you could deliver if only you had twice as much time—thereby, of course, squandering what time you do have. Science fiction author and lecturer Isaac Asimov said, "A good speaker could explain nuclear fission to first graders in ten minutes. Don't blame the complexity of the topic, the level of the audience, or the shortness of time. Just get on with it."

6. **Flip charts.** Open by writing on a flip chart with, naturally, your back to the audience. Ask for the obvious, such as "What's bad about stress?" or "Why should we try to get along with others?" As each page is filled, flip it over so that the audience can't see it anymore. By the time you're ready to begin your seminar, many in the audience are already turned off.

## ***12 Ways to Annoy the Audience (Cont'd)***

*Solution:* If you insist on using a flip chart at the outset, have someone else print main ideas while you face the audience. As a page is filled, rip it off and tape it to the wall. Better still, open with slides or a pre-printed flip chart. Save the handwriting for later.

7. **Assumptions.** Open with statements that exclude part of the audience or that assume the audience knows nothing about the topic. For example, say when speaking about managing money, “Your credit cards are probably maxed out and you have a hard time saving anything.” Anyone who manages money well is excluded. Or when speaking about health and wellness, say, “You probably eat a high-fat diet and get too little exercise.” Those in good shape are excluded.

*Solution:* Rephrase “Whether your credit cards are maxed out or you have interest income, the tips I’m going to share will benefit you.” Or “Couch potatoes, casual walkers and even marathon runners can use these tips.” Now the talk applies to everyone.

8. **Background.** Spend the whole time convincing the audience members why they should be interested in your topic instead of sharing tips about how they can act. Examples: Tell them to be aware the world is becoming more diverse. Tell them that people are living longer. Tell them how many people are overweight and don’t exercise. The audience is probably already aware of such facts, which are regularly reported by the media.

*Solution:* Tell them what to do with this knowledge. Once they are aware that there are more foreign-born people in the workplace, for example, what things can they do to communicate better? Tell stories about mistakes as well as successes.

9. **Name-dropping.** Mention names of well known people you have fraternized with no matter how superficially and who have no relation to the topic you are speaking about. The audience may be impressed and envious but also may become annoyed.

10. **Place-dropping.** Sprinkle throughout your talk references to the exotic places you’ve spoken and especially the next exotic place you’ll be dashing off to as soon as this speech or seminar is over. If the weather is horrid where you’re speaking today and glorious at the spot you’re heading to, the audience may become antagonistic.

11. **Hand-raising.** Demand that the audience raise hands repeatedly for inane questions, such as “How many of you want to succeed?” Some speakers never notice the diminishing number of hands raised as the demands increase. In fact, since their questions are rhetorical, some speakers never attempt to count the audience response at all.

*Solution:* One speaker said, “When I ask the audience to raise hands, I always ask for a purpose. Then I scan the response and report back to them.” Especially those in the front, who can’t see how many hands are raised, like to hear the speaker report: “About two-thirds of you agree.”

12. **“Unique.”** Tell the audience frequently that they should be “unique” and express their “uniqueness” when your talk is not at all unique. Tell the story about the ship captain telling the lighthouse to move. Cite stale, familiar quotations by Lincoln, Churchill, and Yogi Berra rather than compile your own fresh ones.

*Solution:* Seek original examples, from your own experience or from current reading, and save the word “unique” for situations that are truly one-of-a-kind.