WSP Guidelines on Audience and Purpose

The Fundamentals of Communication

There are three fundamentals to any communication you need to consider in this order:

1. Your purpose
2. The audience
3. Their purpose

Begin with the end in mind—what result do you want?

Who can make your desired result happen?

Why do they care? Why are they paying attention? What will they gain? Is your purpose in alignment/complementary to theirs?

Cater to their purpose. Help them achieve it. Offer something of value towards it.

YOUR PURPOSE

"Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel. It is to bring another out of his bad sense into your good sense." – Ralph Waldo Emerson

"If you don't know what you want to achieve in your presentation, your audience never will." – Harvey Diamond

Hone your purpose. Identify the **specific result** or action you want from someone. You want to influence a **specific part of policy**. Define it, then let that focus your work.

Be concise to be effective. Less is more. Brainstorm your ideas, then **reduce, reduce, reduce** until your message is crystal clear.

Ask yourself, "If I'm giving a presentation and only have 5 minutes left, do I explain this or skip it?"

Now consider:

What you want to say   vs.   What they need to hear

Focus on the second one—**what they need to hear**—to achieve your result. This is *only a fraction of what you want to say*. Everything else is extraneous and distracts from your message.

Time is valuable. Attention spans are limited. Stay focused. Control your writing.

THE AUDIENCE

> "If you don't pick your audience, you're lost because you're not really talking to anybody." – Julia Child

Describe your audiences—primary and secondary.

- Who will receive this first?
- Who should really read this?
- Who else may read this?

- How do they think?
- What matters to them?
- What moves them to action?

For public policy, you will have multiple audiences in the hierarchy to consider.

1. Staff member assigned
2. Subject-matter expert or supervisor
3. Decision-maker

Other audiences can include:

- The primary audience's external colleagues (e.g., committee members or political allies)
- Sponsors
- Journalists
- Industry professionals
- General public

The mission(s) of your primary audience may be for the good of society, but *individuals* who take the action you want are often motivated by status, budgets, performance evaluations, or political capital. Each person's thoughts and feelings will influence how each person responds to your work. Persuade, convert, compel **through thoughts and feelings.**

Define each audience. Different people will read different sections, so write to each type of reader.

What statements or criticisms has your audience made on other policy topics? What does this tell you about their values, priorities, or thinking?

Who are their current colleagues, partners, and allies? (secondary motivations and audiences)

Plan your content for each audience:

- What do they know?
- What do they need to know?
- In what order do they need to know it?

For a uniform audience, focus your message. For a varied audience, cast a wider net and use a variety of hooks to connect with those different types of people.

THEIR PURPOSE

"Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value." – Albert Einstein

"It's not as good as you think it is." – My father

You like your own work because you worked hard on it, but what really matters is whether or not:

1. your work is useful to your audience and
2. your audience responds with your desired result or next step.

Your audience will respond to your work only if it is **clear, concise, accurate, useful, and organized.**

For a uniform or specific audience, prune your work so that your readers see your writing filled with *exactly what they need to present to the next person* in a way that is well organized, easy to understand, and useful. Make them think, **"This is exactly what I need. This saves me so much time."**

Brainstorming is easy, pruning your work is hard . . . but if you learn to let go of what you think is important and **remember <u>their</u> purpose**, then you will achieve yours.