



Managing a Difficult Audience

Level 3 Project



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Managing a Difficult Audience

About Managing a Difficult Audience

Part of building your skills as a public speaker and leader is developing strategies for successfully speaking to a variety of audiences.

In this project, you will learn some common behaviors of difficult participants and how to address each behavior in a calm, effective, and professional way.

Resources

The following is a list of resources available in your digital project on Base Camp. Some of these resources, such as evaluations, are also available on the Resources section on Base Camp.

Project Checklist

Evaluation Resources

Role Play Assignments

Introduction and Assignment

Introduction

Whenever groups of people assemble, different personalities are present. The variety has several benefits. The combination of varied opinions and ideas can lead to creative solutions, decisions, and a more lively and interesting discussion. The downside to a varied audience is that differing personalities may mean conflict and disruption.

Your Assignment

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to practice the skills needed to address audience challenges when you present outside of your Toastmasters club.

Overview: Prepare a 5- to 7-minute speech on a topic of your choosing. You may write a new speech or use a speech you presented previously. You will be evaluated on the way you manage audience disruptions, not the content of your speech. Before your club meeting, send the Role Play Assignments resource to the Toastmaster and Vice President Education. As you present your speech, respond to different types of difficult audience members that disrupt you. The process of speaking and responding to audience members will take 12 to 15 minutes.

Understanding the Role Play

This project includes a role play. You will need to contact the Toastmaster of the meeting and the Vice President Education one week before your scheduled speech to review your project requirements. Arrange for one of them to contact club members and coordinate the role play for your assignment.

Ensure that each participating member receives a copy of the Role Play Assignments resource before the meeting. Remind the Vice President Education and the Toastmaster that the disruptive members of the audience are to remain UNKNOWN to you.

Disrupters are expected to avoid getting personal, test you without antagonizing, and stop when you successfully address the disruption.

Download the Role Play Assignments resource, and print or email to your club Vice President Education before your speech.

Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the test. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



Video: Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



Interactive Activity: Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



Resource: Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.



Weblink: Return to your digital project when you see this icon to link to a website or Base Camp location.

For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist.

Learning in Managing a Difficult Audience



Assess and Reflect

To assess and track your knowledge, complete the activity below by listing what you already know and what you wonder about the topic today. Add up to five items to each list. After you complete your project, you will have an opportunity to review your answers and add what you have learned.

Know

For example: I know I can recover after being interrupted during a presentation.

Wonder

For example: I wonder how to successfully defuse a disruption during a presentation.

Competencies

The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.

- Demonstrate the proper action for each type of difficult audience member.
- Defuse tense or uncomfortable situations with an audience.
- Identify a difficult audience member.
- Exhibit professional behavior when addressing a difficult audience member.

How to Recognize a Difficult Audience

Whenever you speak before an audience, you want a response to your message. Depending on the topic and your objectives, you might expect laughter on hearing your humorous speech or participation in a question-and-answer period following an informational speech.

If you've ever witnessed a speaker address a difficult audience or audience member, you know how disruptive some behaviors can be and how interruptions and distractions ruin the enjoyment of everyone in attendance.

Though there are many types of difficult audience members, rules of conduct for the speaker never change. The first and most important is upholding professionalism. Professional behavior can encompass many qualities. They include integrity, respectfulness, and maintaining a calm demeanor.

Regardless of the situation, there are effective ways of defusing tension and returning focus to your presentation. It is always better to avoid engaging in a negative way with anyone in your audience.

The first step in managing a difficult audience member is to recognize the conduct. There are typically five types of difficult audience members, each with a set of unique behaviors: the Talker, the Interrupter, the Chatterer, the Arguer, and the Silent Type.

The Talker

The Talker comments too often and for too long, dominating the discussion.

Use the following strategies when you encounter a Talker during your presentation.

1. Recognize the Talker's contribution; then assert that others must have the chance to speak.
2. Target questions to other participants by name.
3. Avoid making eye contact with the Talker after asking a question. Look at another section of the room instead.
4. When the Talker pauses, immediately thank them and call on another participant to comment.

The Interrupter

The Interrupter may believe they have something to contribute—this participant wants to agree, disagree, or make another point. Some Interrupters are impatient for information and ask questions about topics that will be discussed later. Others simply want attention.

Use the following strategies when you encounter an Interrupter during your presentation.

1. Early in the session, tell participants to note all of their comments and questions. Assure the audience you will address these at the end of the session.
2. Keep participants engaged by asking them to complete an interactive learning activity.
3. Maintain an outline on a flipchart or whiteboard. If your meeting is online, drop notes into the chat function of the application you are using. Be sure to show the order of the topics you will cover. Note each one as it's discussed.
4. Ask the Interrupter to complete a specific task, such as recording other participants' responses from a brainstorming activity.

The Chatterer

The Chatterer engages in individual conversations with other participants. They might comment on something being discussed or talk about an unrelated subject.

Use the following strategies when you encounter a Chatterer during your presentation.

1. Invite the Chatterer to share their topic of conversation with the group.
2. Stop talking and look at the Chatterer until they are quiet.
3. Restate the point being discussed and ask the Chatterer for an opinion.

The Arguer

The Arguer might consider themselves an expert, be someone with incorrect information, or someone who enjoys correcting others. They may also have difficulty stating suggestions in a constructive manner.

Use the following strategies when you encounter an Arguer during your presentation.

1. Acknowledge the Arguer and thank them for contributing.
2. Find merit in one of the Arguer's comments, express your agreement, and move on.
3. Paraphrase the Arguer's comment in objective terms. Then ask the Arguer to explain the reason for the comment or ask someone else for a comment.

The Silent Type

The Silent Type finds it difficult to speak in a group setting. They may stop interacting when questions are posed due to shyness, insecurity, indifference, or uncertainty.

Use the following strategies when you encounter the Silent Type during your presentation.

1. Ask the Silent Type a question you are confident they can answer easily.
2. Ask a question of the group and suggest that all participants take a turn sharing their opinions.
3. Respond with positive enthusiasm when the Silent Type does contribute.



The setting can affect how you handle an audience member who exhibits difficult behavior. Online, in-person, and hybrid meetings can differ when it comes to the level of disruption. For example, in a fully online meeting, you may not need to address the Chatterer when you can see them talking, because their microphone is muted.

However, a person who is repeatedly engaging in conversations unrelated to the meeting they are attending without muting their microphone will need to be addressed. At the very least, you will need to ask them to mute themselves as they speak to others.

Use your discretion when engaging an audience member. If the person's behavior is not a distraction to you or your audience, focus on your presentation. When you do need to address an audience member, having solid strategies will help you engage them effectively with minimal disruption to your speech.



Read the following questions and select the appropriate response.

1. After your presentation, you ask the audience if they have any questions. One audience member stands up and begins giving information that is contradictory to what you just presented. You should:

Acknowledge the valid points, and then thank them for contributing.

Ask them to speak with you later.

Remind them that you're the speaker and therefore have far more credibility.

Engage—this is the time to prove to your audience that you really know what you're talking about.

2. A remote attendee is unmuted and engaged in a side conversation with someone on a live microphone. You should:

Ask them a question that you are confident they can answer easily.

Restate the point being discussed and ask them for an opinion.

Ignore it and go on with your presentation. They will finish talking soon.

Pause and ask them kindly to mute their microphone.

3. Early in your presentation, an attendee interrupts you to ask a question about a topic you have yet to cover. You should:

Stop talking and look at them until they are quiet.

Keep them engaged by asking them to participate in a learning activity.

Paraphrase their comments in objective terms.

Ask a question of the group and suggest that all participants share their opinions.

Answers: 1. Acknowledge the valid points...; 2. Pause and ask...; 3. Keep them engaged...

Review and Apply

Before you complete the assignment, take a moment to read through the questions you see here. If you are not able to answer them comfortably, review the project.

- List at least one method for addressing each type of difficult audience member.
- Describe the difference between professional behavior and unprofessional behavior when addressing a difficult audience member.
- What are some of the best strategies for defusing a tense or uncomfortable situation with an audience?
- How do you recognize when an audience member is disrupting your presentation, even when it is a subtle disruption?

Complete Your Assignment



Project Checklist

Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report. First, review your assignment.

This project includes:

- The Role Play Assignments resource
- Responding to disruptive audience members during a 5- to 7-minute speech

The following list includes tasks for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You can use the checklist here or complete the digital version in your project on Base Camp.

Schedule your speech with the Vice President Education. Make sure you have 15 minutes to complete your assignment at a club meeting.

Write your speech. You may choose any topic.

Rehearse your speech.

Before your speech, send your Vice President Education or Toastmaster of the meeting the Role Play Assignments resource.

On the day of your speech, confirm with the Vice President Education or the Toastmaster that the disrupters have been assigned. You should not be aware of who will play which role or which roles will be played.

When all components of your assignment are finished, complete your self-reflection by adding what you have learned to the last column of the Know-Wonder-Learned activity.

Evaluation Criteria



Review the criteria for the evaluation in this project. Your evaluator will use the following scale:.

5 – Exemplary 4 – Excels 3 – Accomplished 2 – Emerging 1 – Developing

Clarity

- 5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood
- 4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word
- 3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood
- 2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand
- 1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

Vocal Variety

- 5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection
- 4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice
- 1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

Eye Contact

- 5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response
- 4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response
- 3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience
- 2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

Gestures

- 5 – Fully integrates physical gestures with content to deliver an exemplary speech
- 4 – Uses physical gestures as a tool to enhance speech
- 3 – Uses physical gestures effectively
- 2 – Uses somewhat distracting or limited gestures
- 1 – Uses very distracting gestures or no gestures

Audience Awareness

- 5 – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs
- 4 – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively
- 3 – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs
- 2 – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice
- 1 – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

Comfort Level

- 5 – Appears completely self-assured with the audience
- 4 – Appears fully at ease with the audience
- 3 – Appears comfortable with the audience
- 2 – Appears uncomfortable with the audience
- 1 – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

Interest

- 5 – Fully engages audience with exemplary, well-constructed content
- 4 – Engages audience with highly compelling, well-constructed content
- 3 – Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content
- 2 – Content is interesting but not well-constructed or is well-constructed but not interesting
- 1 – Content is neither interesting nor well-constructed

Effective Management

- 5 – Manages difficult audience members with exemplary skill
- 4 – Sets an excellent example of how to manage difficult audience members
- 3 – Demonstrates skill at engaging difficult audience members
- 2 – Shows some skill at engaging difficult audience members but has difficulty with one type of interruption
- 1 – Struggles to address difficult audience members or loses engagement of audience while managing a difficult audience member

Professionalism

- 5 – Sets an exemplary example of professional behavior regardless of difficult audience members
- 4 – Maintains a highly professional response regardless of difficult audience members
- 3 – Remains professional regardless of difficult audience members
- 2 – Remains professional when responding to most difficult audience members but shows some obvious discomfort or reactive responses
- 1 – Is not able to maintain professionalism when responding to difficult audience members

Complete Your Project



Once you have delivered your speech and received your evaluation, take a minute to review what you recorded under “Know” and “Wonder” in the Assess and Reflect section at the start of this project. Then add what you have learned while working through this project. Add up to five items.

Learned

For example: I learned about the types of difficult audiences/individuals.

Before You Move On

Review Your Learning

Review the material in this project.

Deliver Your Speech

Plan, practice, and deliver your speech.

Receive Your Evaluation

Receive your evaluation and complete any other tasks required by your club.

Assess and Reflect

When all components of your assignment are finished, complete your self-reflection by adding what you have learned to the last column of the Know-Wonder-Learned activity.

Congratulations!

If you have completed every task, CONGRATULATIONS! You have completed your Managing a Difficult Audience project and you are ready to move on to your next project.



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