

## **Audiences for talks - ex Clipboard October 2002**

### **What's the Connection?**

#### **- the audience shapes your talk.**

Say 'Please' and 'Thank you' the toddler is reminded. And when the adult waits for the magic word 'please' before handing over the biscuit, and holds it till 'thank you' is heard, the message is reinforced.

So toddlers learn to shape what they say to meet the needs of their listeners and get, not only a biscuit, but also their first lessons in public speaking.

By the time candidates reach Grade Two in Speech and Drama or Public Speaking and Communication, they meet the syllabus instruction 'You must specify your audience'. This is there to remind them that talks should always be devised with an audience in mind. No, not just the examiner! But even when an audience is specified, speakers sometimes give the talk without any reference to that audience, or without showing any connection between that audience and what is said or what is shown. Examiners look for evidence that candidates have designed the talk for the specified audience—for that age group, special interest, need to know or level of attention and understanding.

When candidates say, 'Oh I suppose the audience could be people who.....' It's clear that those people were never in mind when the talk was devised, and those people are certainly not in the mind of candidates who don't relate to them during the talk. One of the clearest ways that candidates ignore their audiences is seen in how they choose and display visual aids. For example, it's clear that speakers have never sat well back from their visual aids to realise that a class audience of 20—30, would not be able to read those tiny words or see on the tiny map where something happened.

Some candidates give the show away by designing a poster as **their** memory prompt and that's how they use it. They need to remember that visuals are primarily to aid the audience not the speaker.

Some candidates do ask a rhetorical question as an opening such as, 'Have you ever visited...?' or 'Have you ever played...?' and then give a talk about their own visit or experience playing a game. By thinking about the place or the game in the listeners' terms they could tell them 'You would be able to see...' or 'The hardest part of

learning the game is...'. This keeps the connection right through to the closing where the audience is often told 'You'd love going to...' or 'You should try this game'.

**A check list for candidates to review when preparing their talks for their specified audience:**

- ♦ Who is my audience? - .
- ♦ What age group are they?
- ♦ Are they boys? girls? adult males? adult females? a mixed gender group? a mixed age group?
- ♦ Do they know anything about this subject or is it new to them?
- ♦ Do I need to spell or write up new, foreign or technical words they may not know?
- ♦ What will this audience need to see to make the information clearer/ more interesting? Memorable?
- ♦ Would the audience have some experience I can use to make a comparison with something new in the talk?
- ♦ Has this audience been somewhere or have we had a shared experience I can refer to?
- ♦ Can I refer to something or someone they would know to establish some link with them? To build rapport?
- ♦ If I am giving a grade 4 instructive talk, how much could the audience absorb and **learn to do** in a 4 minute talk? Not just hear about it.
- ♦ Can I really imagine this audience? See them in my mind's eye, how and where they are sitting?

**Next steps:**

**Once an audience profile emerges from the answers** to these questions, speakers can check that this information shapes the talk they are preparing. With an older or younger audience, they may need to review the words used. If the audience is young they may have to change some words or add explanations. If the group doesn't have Maori or know the words used from a foreign language, they may need to explain terms before giving descriptions or instructions using those terms. Perhaps those

words could be displayed? Should the visuals be enlarged, or the audience invited to come up after the talk and see the small objects being talked about, such as stamps or fishing flies? What sequence of words could be listed to help this specified group follow the process or remember key steps and their order?

Other more sophisticated questions could be added as candidates progress through the grades and meet the demands of other types of talks. Speakers may need to know political or religious affiliations of their audience, how they feel about the subject of the talk, their education or preferences. The answer to these and other questions they will use to shape the talk.

So when preparing a public speech, remember the words of Aristotle which still apply today: the audience, the message, the speaker. While all three are interconnected, the speaker can shape a more effective message by placing the audience first.