Hello to all of you. This is Dr. Foss-Snowden again and welcome to the COMS 103 podcast lecture about audience adaptation. Adapting to your audience is one of the most important things you can do if you are interested in making a real and successful connection with people, and if you’re interested in being a leader (which I hope all of you are), then you MUST pay attention to audience analysis and adaptation.

I’ve broken up the following lecture into two components: 1) adapting what you say, and 2) adapting how you say it, and even though I’m SURE that you are dying to get right to that information, we have to take it back one week and think about our question of the week. To refresh your memory, I asked you to start by thinking of a certain person, a friend, but not your best friend. This friend, unfortunately, is going to be attacked by a bear, but she or he is 100% guaranteed to survive the attack.

However, you cannot know the extent of your friend’s injuries...they could be minor, or they could be devastating. You’ll remember that you magically have the ability to stop the attack. You can save your friend from the bear, but if you choose to stop the bear, you will from that moment on have a little rain cloud following you for the rest of your life. So, I asked you to decide: do you stop the bear and accept a lifetime of rain or do you let your friend battle it out with Mr. Grizzly?

Normally, I take these questions and I do some fancy dancing to connect them to our topic of the week, but this time, Mr. Klosterman did all the connecting in advance. This question is the introduction to a chapter in Klosterman’s book entitled *IV: A Decade of Curious People and Dangerous Ideas*, and the chapter is called “Nemesis.” In this chapter, Klosterman argues that the two most important mechanisms in any human’s life are a) one quality nemesis, and b) one archenemy. He says they are the catalysts for why we do everything.

Of course, he’s being a bit romantic and dramatic about it, but I think it’s an interesting idea, so let’s run with it for a moment. Klosterman has us make the distinction between a nemesis and an archenemy. He says we despise our nemesis, but we kind of like him or her, too. Our archenemy, in contrast, we hate so much that we keep our hatred secret because we don’t want to give that person the satisfaction of being hated. We measure ourselves against our nemeses, and we long to destroy our archenemies. Still confused about the difference? Luckily, Klosterman gives us a few examples to clear things up for us. If you like 1980s professional basketball, then surely you know that Larry Bird’s nemesis was Magic Johnson. They were rivals, and it was always a beautiful thing to watch. But Magic was NOT Bird’s archenemy. That honor belonged to Isiah Thomas. If you like rock, then you know that Vince Neil of Motley Crue once challenged Axl Rose of Guns n’ Roses to a public fistfight, and Vince probably thought of Axl as his archenemy, but they were really only nemeses. Axl’s true archenemy was...Kurt Cobain, which is why GNR completely fell apart after Cobain took his own life in 1994.

Since you know I love Star Trek, let’s do a Star Trek one. Captain Jean-Luc Picard
has many nemeses, and most of them are entire species of humanoids (the Romulans, the Ferengi, the Cardassians, certainly the Borg...), but I might argue that his archenemy is Q...the one guy in the entire universe who can make Picard feel dumb or ineffective. Feel free to argue with me on this one.

One more: the Joker and Batman. The Joker is only Batman’s nemesis, because Batman’s archenemy is Superman. Why? Well, Klosterman says that Superman makes it all too obvious that Batman is merely mortal, which makes him completely irrelevant and useless in a world that already has Superman.

So what does all of this nemesis/archenemy/bear attack/constant rain business have to do with audience adaptation, right? Well, let’s start with the bear attack. If in your mind, you thought about a real friend when I gave that story, then maybe you would take the rain. However, if you thought about a nemesis, you might have had to think longer about it, and you thought about an archenemy, you would probably say, “dear archenemy, please get well from that bear attack soon” because you’re a decent person.

Here’s the point: you would have to know the person, or at least the type of person involved (friend, nemesis, archenemy), BEFORE you could make your decision. In presentational speaking, you have to know the people, or at least the types of people involved, before you make decisions about what you will present and the manner in which you will present it. Are you speaking to your friends? Are you presenting to a nemesis? Will the room be filled with your archenemies? Imagine this: you prepare a speech that your friends will love, only to arrive and find only unfamiliar faces. I suppose you can HOPE that those people will be friendly to you, but a leader doesn’t just rely on hope to get through a presentation. A leader plans ahead, plans carefully for the possibilities.

So today’s lecture is about how to be a leader when it comes to making that plan, analyzing your audience, and adapting your presentation accordingly. I’d like to begin with adapting what you plan to say to your audience, and in order to do that, you have to start with audience analysis. Audience analysis is your process of learning everything you can about the people who will receive your presentation. What do you already know about them? What can you tell just by observing them, and what have they told you? Is there anything else that you can learn about them by asking questions? This step requires some energy and time, but it ends up being worth it.

In a moment, I’m going to discuss with you the dangers of making assumptions, but I’m going to slap the hypocrite label on myself and make an assumption here, and that is that you learned the basics of audience analysis in your general education speaking course. So, I don’t want to spend a lot of time on the basics here. You should already know that it’s important to pay attention to the demographic composition of your audience. You should already know that in most college classrooms, you could get away with assuming that all of the people in the class are within a six to seven year age window, but you can’t get away with that assumption at Sac State. Chances are good that there are people in the class who are much
younger than you, and chances are just as good that there are people in the class who are much older than you. Some of us are parents, some are grandparents, and some are living at home with their parents. And, even though it is a bad idea to apply stereotypes based on that demographic information like age, it is a good idea to recognize that there might be some differences in perspective, at the very least, represented by the different generations of students currently taking this class and forming your audience for these presentations.

We could do the same thing with racial and ethnic background or nationality. I trust that you all are savvy enough to recognize that not everyone shares your same racial or ethnic background. One of the benefits to living in California is that you get exposed to many different kinds of people, whether you like it or not. But, you might not be as aware of the sneaky little ways that our prejudices and biases can creep into our communication with each other. Here’s an example. I once had a student say in a speech that all of our ancestors came here to make a better life for themselves. That’s a lovely notion, isn’t it? Well, as I sat there grading the speech, being an audience member, I started thinking about it, and I realized that the student’s statement might be true for my ancestors who came to the United States from Norway and Germany, but not so much for my ancestors who had less of a choice about it, the ones who came from the West coast of Africa, or the ones who were already here. I looked around the room, and I saw frowns on the faces of some of our international students. Their ancestors didn’t come here to make a better life for themselves, because their ancestors didn’t come here. It was fascinating to actually watch a speaker losing an audience, to actually see it happen in real time.

I feel like I can sense you feeling uncomfortable right now, thinking that you are doomed to stick your foot in your mouth one way or the other this semester if I keep on constructing these giant PC barriers for you to try to climb over, and the truth is...you’re right. You probably will stick your foot in your mouth...everyone does. Even the people who are the best speakers, the most prominent leaders, and the big shots...all of them blow it every now and then. All I care about is that you think about trying to be inclusive. Think about the demographics of your audience, and THINK about the ways that each category could be more diverse than you think. Is it safe to assume that everyone in the class is a struggling college student? No...you don’t KNOW FOR SURE that everyone is struggling. Academia tends to be a liberal place, but does that mean that there are no Republicans, Independents, Libertarians, or Green Party members in your audience? You can’t make that assumption, right? A lot of people in this country are Christians, but a lot of people aren’t. Imagine how YOU would feel if someone just assumed that you were something or believed in something that is totally different from what you believe. You wouldn’t like it, and you probably would not be excited to support that speaker. We’ll talk more about this topic later in the semester. For now, I just want you to think about limiting your assumptions, and increasing your actual knowledge about your audience.

Doing this kind of thinking, this thoughtful work, is connected to the concept of universal design. You might have heard of universal design, especially those of you
who are interested in building design or ADA (or Americans with Disabilities Act) matters. I’ve assigned a very interesting piece on this topic in the anthology for later, but for now, the concept of universal design refers to the creation of spaces that are accessible by people of all ages, sizes, and abilities. You might be familiar with the Squeeze Inn, a burger joint over on Fruitridge and Power Inn. A woman sued the place because it was not ADA compliant. A lot of people were outraged because they didn’t like the thought of losing that yummy cheese skirt, but to be fair, the Sacramento location of The Squeeze Inn is a perfect example of a place that was not universally designed. You have to go up some rickety steps to get in there, and then you have to SQUEEZE your way in to the place if you want to eat inside...if you are less able or a larger person, you do not feel comfortable, and you don’t feel like the place was designed to welcome a customer like you. A space that demonstrates universal design is BUILT with all kinds of people in mind. It hasn’t been renovated to make it work for everyone; it was designed to work for everyone.

We use this concept in education, also. UDL, or universal design for learning, means that a lesson plan or a presentation has been designed to incorporate people of all ages, sizes, and abilities. For example, I used to have a line in my lecture about why it’s important to stand up when you speak. Then, one of my favorite students, a brilliant young woman who had been in a wheelchair for most of her life, asked me (in a very sincere manner, not the least bit passive-aggressive) if I thought that she was losing credibility and authority because she could not stand. I felt like the biggest idiot on the planet. She had more credibility and authority in that class than the vast majority of the students who did not use a wheelchair. So, now, I really try to consider UDL when I’m constructing my lectures. I think about the fact that my students have different abilities, and different learning styles, and I try to build my presentation in a way that keeps everyone in mind. Sometimes, I still miss, but I try. And all I’m asking you to do is try. After a while, my guess is that it will become more natural, for both of us. Again, we’ll have more to say on this topic when we get to the Diversity lecture.

Now, I can understand if asking you to be sensitive and respectful of all of the different kinds of people in your audience makes you a little nervous. You might be thinking, Well, how in the WORLD am I supposed to “increase my actual knowledge” when there are six million different categories that I have to consider now? That’s impossible! Okay...it’s not impossible. If you want to know about your audience, you should ask them. I’m not suggesting that you should schedule an in-depth interview with each of the people in your section, but I am suggesting that you should try a few information-collecting methods to get what you need for your presentation.

To begin, you should have been collecting information just by paying attention in section. I don’t mean that you should be eavesdropping on the conversations your classmates have before and after class, but maybe you heard something interesting during an impromptu speech. Maybe you noticed one day after class that one of your classmates rides a motorcycle to school, or maybe you bumped into one of your classmates and his family at the grocery store. If you've been paying attention, then you've been giving yourself some help, and you should congratulate yourself for
being so smart and observant.

But, maybe you've been a little distracted. Maybe you JUST finally got added to this stupid class and you've been nervous and cranky and unable to focus. Maybe you were even in a totally different section up until this week! Worry no longer...it’s never too late to analyze your audience (unless, of course, your speech is over).

Outside of academia, you usually only have research sources and your observation skills available to help you paint a picture of your audience. Here, however, you have the ability to survey your audience. If you find yourself in a position where you have to give a presentation and you have the opportunity to survey the audience BEFORE you present, grab that opportunity with both hands. When you CAN survey, you NEED to survey.

So, let’s quickly discuss a few ideas about how to distribute and collect this survey information. You can always do a “by a show of hands” sort of poll, but that’s also what the clickers are for. Why not use them? If you let your GA know ahead of time that you would like to poll the audience at the beginning or conclusion of section, your GA would probably be more than happy to assist you in conducting this kind of research for your speech. If you need more specific responses, you can always create a paper survey that you pass around.

In either case, you need to spend some time thinking about your questions. Your audience will be frustrated if you ask them confusing questions, or questions that are just weird, but they’ll be happy to help out if you ask the right questions.

My first suggestion of three about creating survey questions is that you should plan your questions carefully. Impromptu surveys usually don’t work out. If you’ve actually taken a few moments to think about what you really NEED to know, you’ll ask better questions, get better answers, and you’ll be able to write a better presentation. Don’t forget that you can use the clickers to get a range of responses. For example, if you want to know how your audience feels about a particular topic, you can imagine that the A through E buttons on the clicker represent the “strongly agree” through “strongly disagree” responses on a typical Likert scale question. You could say, “The Tooth Fairy is real. Click A if you strongly agree, B to agree, C if you’re unsure, D to disagree, and E to strongly disagree.”

My second suggestion is that you keep your questions simple. Limit each question to one main idea. Don’t try to cram a bunch of ideas into one question. You can have more than one question, and then each question can be nice and clear. Also, you want to avoid using terms like all, or always, or none, or never. Your audience might be reacting in their responses to the extreme instead of giving you an honest response. So, when it comes to asking questions of your audience, remember to plan your questions in advance, and keep them simple.

My third suggestion is that you read Chapter 9 in the anthology very carefully. This chapter will help you in achieving success in the areas covered in my first two suggestions!

So I’ve been observant, but I want more specifics, so I decide to give my audience a
survey. I’m going with the paper survey, and I’ve set aside some time to plan the structure of my questions carefully, and I understand that I need to make them nice and simple, but I’m still not sure what kinds of questions should I ask. Luckily, I’ve done the assigned readings, and it gave me a good start on the kinds of questions I should want to ask. I’m so glad I’ve been doing the reading.

Remember, this first part of the week’s lecture has been about how to adapt what you say to your audience, based on who they actually are. The information you’ve collected is good…but…demographic information might not end up being all that helpful, right? If you shouldn’t make assumptions, then what does it matter how many people in the class are married and how many are single? What does it mean to be married? What can you NOW say since you found out that a certain percent of the class has never been married? The trick to using demographic information is to use it for what it IS, not what it SUGGESTS. Let’s look at an example to prove my point, and then we’ll be done with part one.

Let’s say I want to give a speech about why becoming a divorce lawyer is a good career choice for people majoring in business or communication studies. I decide to find out if anyone in the class has been divorced. I design a survey that asks my audience to respond to the following question: “What is your experience with marriage? Click A if you have never been married. Click B if you are currently engaged or married. Click C if you are separated. Click D if you are divorced. Click E if you are a widow/widower.” I feel really proud of myself, because I thought about what all of the possible marriage experiences in the class might be, and then I covered them all with my five choices. When I get my results, I find that 15 have never been married, 5 are engaged or married, 5 are divorced and 2 are widows. I think I’m safe, now, to make the point in my speech that even in a class this small, we have a significant number of people who have needed a divorce lawyer.

Technically, I’m right, and I have adapted that part of my presentation to my audience, based on who they are demographically. BUT, my survey did NOT reveal to me the two people in the audience who tuned me out as soon as I started talking about marriage, because those two people happen to not be allowed by law to get married in the state of California. They probably clicked “A” for “never been married,” but that demographic information didn’t tell me what I REALLY needed to know about my audience, which is that a speech about marriage, ANY part of marriage, right now, is a touchy subject for a lot of people, it’s not universally designed, and it doesn’t make a good topic in THIS environment, for THIS audience. You can’t ignore the point here that sometimes, your audience analysis will tell you that you need to give a different speech.

The next part of this week’s podcast will help you do just that. Here, we’ve discussed how to adapt what you plan to say, and next we’ll discuss how to adapt the way in which you say what you plan to say. You come right back…I’ll be here, dreaming about cheese skirts.

Musical outro: West Precinct
Musical introduction: *West Precinct*

Welcome back! You are listening to part two of this week’s Audience Adaptation podcast lecture, and I’m Dr. Foss-Snowden. Let’s pick back up where we left off, shall we?

Now that you’ve figured out how to use audience analysis to choose your words and topics wisely, now you have to figure out how to keep on adapting to your audience so that those words and topics you’ve chosen have the most impact on them.

While you were reading the chapters in the anthology, it might have occurred to you to think about your audience’s motivation. Are they a captive audience, or are they here voluntarily? Yeah, yeah…it’s a free country, and if people don’t want to hear your speech, they can always leave...whatever. By “captive” audience, we’re talking about the board meeting or annual conference or the COMS 103 section. They COULD get up and leave, but if they want to keep their jobs or get that promotion or grade, then they are pretty much forced to hear what you have to say.

A voluntary audience, on the other hand, has come to hear your presentation because they WANT to do so. Perhaps they noticed your sassy title and wanted to find out what the heck you meant by all that alliteration. Here in class, you have a captive audience and you have to adapt your delivery for that reason. You’ll have to be more energetic, you’ll have to use more and better humor, you’ll have to project your presentation right into the sleepy and apathetic hearts of the people in that room, because you don’t have their inherent interest to boost you up.

Now that that’s out of the way, you can start really thinking about how to apply what you now know about your audience to how you deliver your presentation. You need to ask yourself what your audience’s connection is to your topic? There are basically three kinds of people in your audience: the sympathetic, the reluctant, and the undecided. In general, the sympathetic audience members are on your side. They like what you’re talking about, they’ve heard it before, and they think it’s good. They will nod as you talk. It’s nice to have Sympathetics in your audience.

Reluctants, on the other hand, are not as much fun to have in the audience. They, too, have heard about your topic, but they do not agree. They live on the other side of the aisle from you. The people who are Undecideds either don’t know much about your topic, or they do know and they just really haven’t decided how they feel yet, or what they believe.

Chapter 8 in your reader breaks the sympathetic audience and the reluctant audience into two categories each (advocates and supporters on the sympathetic side, and naysayers and opponents on the reluctant side). You can think of an advocate as a person who agrees with you and will join your struggle, while a supporter agrees with you from the sideline. Similarly, a naysayer might stay on the sidelines and whisper negative things about you while an opponent is more than happy to jump up and argue the other side right in front of you. The undecided or neutral folks don’t need to be broken down any further, unless you find some worth in mentally separating those who can’t decide because they don’t know from those who can’t decide because they just can’t decide.
Usually, especially with the controversial topics that 103 students love to choose, you end up with an audience that is MOSTLY sympathetic or reluctant or undecided. But, sometimes, you’ll have a combination audience, where some of the people are sympathetic and SOME of them are reluctant and some are undecided. There are definite strategies for each kind of audience, so let’s deal with each one, one at a time.

The sympathetic audience is on your side, but you still don’t want your presentation to backfire and send them over to the reluctant side. Let’s pick a fun topic for our example, like licorice. It wouldn’t be a good topic for a presentation in this class, but it will work just fine for our little example here. Okay, so licorice. You want your audience to buy more products that are flavored with licorice. The Sympathetics already like licorice, so what do you do?

Number one, you have to make them feel good for how far they’ve already come. You want to stroke their egos a bit, in essence thanking them for doing something that they didn’t even realize they were doing. Number two, you need to associate yourself with that good feeling you’ve now created in them. You need them to think about you and what you want them to do when they think about that thing that they already like. Once you’ve made that connection, you’re in good.

For your Reluctants, you also have two strategies. These people are at best skeptical of what you’re going to say, so for these folks, you want to seek minor changes. You probably are not going to get them to eat licorice, straight out, but you might be able to get them to try something flavored with a little licorice, like Galliano, which is the yellow liqueur that comes in the tallest bottle at the bar. They might not even notice it! Baby steps! The second strategy is to borrow the respect they give to someone on their side and use it to your advantage. We’ll be talking a lot more about this idea when we get to our lecture on logic and proof, but for now, it’s enough to say that if you have analyzed your audience, then you should know some of the figureheads that are important to them. I’m reaching here, but let’s say they really respect Jon Stewart, and you happen to discover that Jon Stewart loves licorice. Use that information against those stubborn Reluctants. They can think to themselves, Well, if Jon Stewart likes licorice, maybe it’s not THAT bad...

For the Undecideds in your audience, you have to realize that they are that way for a reason. You have to provide the missing link. What is it that they haven’t yet heard? What don’t they know? Where is that thing that will help them move over to the Sympathetic side of the gym. Again, if you’ve done that good analysis work, then the answers to these questions shouldn’t be that difficult to find.

When it comes to the combination audience, you can treat them like you would treat an undecided audience. I want you to think for a second about why that might be the case. I’ll even give you some thinking music (West Precinct, again). I’m serious...are you thinking? Jot down why you think a combo audience should be treated like an undecided audience. Still thinking. Okay...do you have your idea ready? Here’s the answer: you’ve already got those in the audience who are sympathetic, you probably won’t completely get the Reluctants, so you have the best chance of winning over
the highest number of folks if you target the Undecideds. Make sense? It’s basically a numbers game.

So, let’s quickly review: Sympathetic audiences need to be reminded that they’ve done a good thing, and they need to associate that good feeling with YOU, their new leader. Reluctant audiences can be influenced by requests to take baby steps, and by connections to the people or the institutions they find most credible. Undecided audiences need to find the missing link, and the combination audience is basically the same thing as an undecided one.

Maybe you feel annoyed with the idea that you have to do SO MUCH to adapt your presentation to your audience, and maybe you feel like it should be easier than what I’m describing here. It’s important for you to remember that people are basically egocentric, which you shouldn’t take immediately as a negative description. We pay most attention to material when we understand how it applies to us. So, if you take all these extra steps, you’ll get to see them pay off. The more you do to rope in your audience, the more successful you will be. There are a few more tricks that you can use, for all types of audience members. I’d like to share three of them with you.

Firstly, you can reference the people in your audience specifically. Yes, I mean you should use that person’s name. If you mention Julia’s name, I’ll bet you just got Julia’s attention. I’ll bet you also got the attention of everyone else who now wants to know if they are going to hear you use their names, too. How about you, Patrick, Stella, and Lauren? The second trick is to reference something I said in a podcast, or something your GA said in class, or recent events. It becomes like an instant inside joke. The third trick, and this one is really for the professionals, is to reference a previous presentation. What if you’ve prepared a great presentation about why licorice rocks, and the person before you gives an amazing presentation about why licorice should be illegal. You have to be ready to think on your feet (it’s why we do impromptu speaking exercises). What could your approach be? You could throw the other speaker under the bus (“So, Amanda just told you that licorice should be illegal, and we all know she’s crazy, so let’s get right to the REAL story about licorice. What do you say?”). You could do that, but that’s not what a leader would do. A leader would be gracious and complimentary, and would say something like, “You all just heard Amanda’s awesome presentation about licorice, and a lot of what she told you is completely true. However, I’d like to give you another perspective on the topic, and maybe I’ll even be able to change Amanda’s mind by the time I’m done.” By doing so, you are letting your audience know that you are paying attention, you understand your topic, and you are confident enough to change things up on the fly.

It’s tough, though, so I might stick to the first two tricks until you get a little more practice under your belt. Of course, COMS 103 is a lab, so the worst thing that could happen from trying it and blowing it would be that you would feel a little awkward. The world will spin madly on, and you’ll survive, so actually...I think you should go for it! Chapter 10 in your reader gives you even more tricks you can use to adapt how you say what you’ve decided to say, so you should read it carefully.

The final matter to consider when dealing with how to adapt your delivery to your
audience is to consider the environment. Think about the size of the room. Will your audience appreciate a little movement, or would you moving around freak them out? At what time of the day will you be speaking? If you speak around food times, maybe you could throw in a line about lunch coming soon, or ask if anyone has any recommendations for a place to have dinner. Are they missing a good TV show by being in your audience? Work it in! What is the temperature? I could go on, but I think you get the point. You have to adapt to the physical environment as much as you have to adapt to the social one.

So, we’ve covered the basics of audience analysis and adaptation, and even after all the hints and tricks, the fundamental idea is this: if you pay attention to your audience, with great respect, you will be more successful. Plain and simple. The end.

Next week we’ll discuss delivery, and how it can change the success of your presentation, sometimes for the better, and unfortunately, sometimes for the worse.

As I always will, I’d like to leave you this week with another question to ponder until next week, and this one is also courtesy of Chuck Klosterman. Klosterman asks us to imagine a game show where we have to compete for the right to stay alive. The competition will have five events: an 800 meter run, a game of Scrabble, three rounds of boxing, a debate about the legalization of late-term abortions which will be scored by competent collegiate judges, and the math portion of the SAT. In order to win and stay alive, you have to be better than your competitor at three of the five events. But in your opponent we find our twist. You have a choice: you can either compete against someone selected totally at random, or you can compete against someone who, for all intents and purposes, is exactly like you. If you take the first choice, the random competitor, you could end up with a six month old baby, or you could end up with John Elway, who played professional football AND went to a little school called Stanford. If you take the second choice, the alternate universe you, your opponent will be your age, your gender, he/she will have your education, your height, your weight, and so on.

So, do you take your chances against the average person, or do you think you’re better than an average version of yourself?

Until next time, thanks for listening.

Musical outro: West Precinct