

## More than a Clicker: Teaching Audience Analysis Through Fast-Response Technology

Basic Communication Course / Introduction to Public Speaking

### Learning Objectives:

1. Understand how an audience influences a speech through multiple perspectives, experiences, and frames of reference.
2. Practice using informal methods of data collection.
3. Practically determine and analyze audience attitudes and beliefs.
4. Learn to adapt an informative or persuasive message based on an in-class audience analysis.

Socrative URL: [b.socrative.com](https://www.socrative.com) (Select Student Login)

Socrative Room Name: US87AYPKW

### Rationale:

Audience analysis is an indispensable component of the basic communication course. To become better public speakers, students must learn to conduct formal and informal analyses that will help them address the needs and expectations of audiences in particular rhetorical situations (Verderber, Verderber, & Sellnow, 2014). Additionally, effective audience analysis strategies will help students: 1) appear more credible, 2) engage in ethical communication, and 3) develop security and confidence in their presentation abilities (Simonds, Hunt, & Simonds, 2013). This activity engages students with a real-time audience analysis technique in preparation for their public speaking assignments. Students will engage in important discussions concerning the influence of audience beliefs and values in relation to their own behaviors.

Furthermore, because effective analysis may help speakers develop a better connection with their audience (Jones, 2015), it is essential for instructors to adapt to the needs of their particular audiences (i.e., students). Students expect to use technology in the classroom (Schrodt & Turman, 2005; Schrodt & Witt, 2006; Turman & Schrodt, 2005; Witt & Schrodt, 2006). Consequently, it is imperative that instructors find unique, creative ways of teaching traditional public speaking concepts through technology.

One technology that successfully meets this goal is Socrative ([www.socrative.com](https://www.socrative.com)). Socrative is a “software application that provides instructors with a way to complete all of those tasks that clickers generally can do through several templates for examination, polling, and competitions” (Tyma, 2015, p. 1). While some similar activities exist using relatively expensive classroom clickers (Barbour, 2013), Socrative offers a free alternative to this method. Socrative displays polling results to the class while offering anonymity for students. Instructors can create closed or open-ended questions that help students better understand the demographic and psychological characteristics of their audience (Simonds et al., 2013). Additionally, by displaying these results, instructors can engage students in focused conversations regarding the ways in which the features of the audience will shape students’ individually-selected speech topics. As noted by Bunce, VandenPlas, and Havanki (2006), students need this type of extended dialogue when using responded based-systems to aide their learning. Thus, Socrative provides a free, practical means by which students can actively participate in the collection, interpretation, and implementation of audience analysis methods.

### Description of the Activity:

This activity may be completed in 50 and 75-minute class periods. Socrative requires an Internet connection through smartphones, tablets, or laptop computers, as well as a specific classroom key (provided through the website) for access; however, it is free to both students and instructors.

Prior to the activity, students should have a basic knowledge of the importance of audience analysis in relation to public speaking. Second, students should already have a topic idea for their next speech assignment, which will help with practical application and understanding. For instance, if a student knows they want to deliver an informative speech on “How political primaries work”, then they can apply the information learned about their classmates to this particular topic. Finally, quizzes must be created in Socrative *a priori* by the instructor. The quiz questions can be demographic questions based on the instructor’s preferences, a list of questions constructed by the students themselves, attitudinal assessments of identified speech topics, or a combination of these ideas.

Upon beginning the activity, instructors should explain to students that they will have anonymity in their responses and that the information they provide will help identify the characteristics that define their audience. Once a question is displayed, students will be given time to provide a response on their device. Once all students have completed the question, engage them in a brief discussion regarding the way that specific idea relates to the construction of their speech. Questions for students to answer upon viewing their demographic or psychological results include:

- What does this information tell us about our class as an audience?
- Can you identify specific values or beliefs based on the present information?
- How will knowing this information affect the way we approach writing the speech?
- Knowing this information, what are some ways you can adjust your own speech?
- If your audience feels strongly/apathetically about a particular piece of information or issue, how does that affect the way you prepare to deliver the information?
- **Debriefing:** How does the classroom environment shape the responses? How might this change in other environments? How does the *type* of speech change the way you approach analyzing the audience? Apart from giving a speech for a class, where else might audience analysis be important? What are some other ways you can collect information for audience analysis?

Once the activity has been completed, Socrative allows the instructor to download and distribute a detailed report of the information to students. This way, students will still have access to the information collected in the analysis to use when applying what they learned.

### **Assignment Assessment:**

First, students appreciated being able to use their various forms of technology in the classroom, even for noninstructional purposes. Second, the activity served to reduce uncertainty regarding expectations for the speech assignment. Students are able to produce better final speech products by developing practical audience analysis knowledge under the guidance of the instructor. Last, students enjoy being able to participate in the activity freely and anonymously. The activity gives students the chance to experience audience analysis in a simple, aggregated format that should set an effective example for future methods of information gathering. Despite the positives listed, instructors should be wary of student attrition with the assignment, as everyday demographic questions may appear boring and repetitive. For extensions to the assignment, instructors may ask students to devise their own questions for future analyses or have students work together to share the different ways they might incorporate this information directly into their speech outlines.