Neya Global Journal of Non-Profit Studies

2025

Teaching Paper: Glossary of Public Speaking and Audience Engagement Terms

DOI: 10.64357/neya-gjnps-eng-au-tp-tch-tp-05

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.64357/neya-gjnps-eng-au-tp-tch-tp-05

Abstract

Effective public speaking requires more than rhetorical skill—it demands a grasp of foundational terms and practices that guide audience engagement, inclusivity, and adaptability. This Teaching Paper presents a comprehensive glossary of concepts essential for speakers, trainers, and non-profit leaders, ranging from audience analysis and cultural sensitivity to vocal variety, storytelling, and social media integration. Each term is explained with both academic grounding and practical application, providing a bridge between theory and practice. Case examples illustrate how concepts such as interactive elements, feedback forms, Monroe's Motivated Sequence, and visual aids can transform presentations into participatory and impactful experiences. Reflection questions and self-assessment prompts support deeper learning, while attention to challenges such as technical difficulties and voice care ensure practical relevance. This glossary serves as a standalone academic resource and a practical reference for building communication skills in diverse contexts, including live events, virtual presentations, and webinars.

Keywords

Public speaking; audience engagement; interactive elements; vocal variety; cultural sensitivity; storytelling; inclusivity; virtual presentations

Executive Summary

This Teaching Paper consolidates essential terms in public speaking and audience engagement into a structured glossary designed for both academic study and practical application. Concepts include:

- **Audience-centered frameworks** (*audience analysis, demographics, personas*).
- **Engagement tools** (*interactive elements, open-ended questions, rhetorical questions, polls, storytelling*).
- **Delivery techniques** (*pitch, tone, pacing, volume, vocal variety, body language, voice care*).
- **Evaluation methods** (*feedback forms, pre- and post-event surveys, peer review, self-assessment*).
- **Digital dimensions** (*social media integration, virtual presentations, webinars, data visualization*).

The glossary emphasizes **cultural sensitivity**, **inclusivity**, and **emotional connection**, highlighting their importance in today's diverse communication environments.

Purpose and Learning Objectives

Purpose: To provide learners and practitioners with a clear reference glossary of foundational terms in public speaking and audience engagement.

Learning Objectives:

- Define and apply key terms relevant to communication and public speaking.
- Connect theoretical concepts (e.g., Monroe's Motivated Sequence) to practical strategies.
- Enhance awareness of inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and digital adaptation in presentations.
- Identify personal areas for improvement using self-assessment and peer review.

Background and Context

Classic rhetoric (Aristotle) and modern communication theory (Mehrabian, Birdwhistell, Goffman) highlight that effective **public speaking** is both verbal and **non-verbal communication**. Scholars such as Bryson and Patton extend this logic into strategic planning: understanding stakeholders (**audience analysis, personas**) and adapting messages for impact.

In today's environment, speakers must balance traditional tools (**storytelling, visual aids**) with digital innovations (**virtual presentations, webinars, social media integration**). Furthermore, non-profits and educators require frameworks that emphasize **cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and emotional connection**, ensuring trust and accessibility across diverse contexts.

Practical Guide: Key Terms and Applications

1. **Audience Analysis** – Systematically studying the audience to tailor communication.
   Application: Guides tone, content, and delivery.

2. **Audience Demographics** – Statistical data like age, gender, education, occupation.
   Application: Anticipates needs (e.g., literacy, digital skills).

3. **Audience Personas / Persona** – Fictional characters based on real audience data.
   Application: Create "Maria" the community health worker to anticipate engagement needs.

4. **Call to Action** – A prompt to encourage immediate audience action.
   Application: "Sign up today" in a fundraising speech.

5. **Cultural Sensitivity** – Respect for cultural differences in communication.
   Application: Avoiding idioms not understood cross-culturally.

6. **Data Visualization** – Charts/infographics to clarify information.
   Application: Using graphs in training evaluation reports.

7. **Emotional Connection** – Bond built via personal stories or tone.
   Application: Sharing a lived experience in advocacy.

8. **Feedback Forms** – Tools to capture audience perceptions.
   Application: Post-event questionnaires.

9. **Hypothetical Questions** – Stimulate imagination with scenarios.
   Application: "Imagine if every volunteer doubled their hours…"

10. **Inclusivity** – Ensuring all participants are considered and respected.
    Application: Using accessible language and adaptive tools.

11. **Interactive Elements** – Questions, polls, group activities.
    Application: Mentimeter polls during a presentation.

12. **Monroe's Motivated Sequence** – Attention → Need → Satisfaction → Visualization → Action.
    Application: Structuring a fundraising pitch.

13. **Non-Verbal Communication** – Gestures, eye contact, posture, facial expressions.
    Application: Standing tall projects confidence.

14. **Open-Ended Questions** – Invite detailed responses.
    Application: "What challenges do you face in your work?"

15. **Pacing** – Speed of delivery.
    Application: Slow down when explaining complex terms.

16. **Peer Review** – Colleagues review and give feedback.
    Application: Practice speeches with peers before delivery.

17. **Pitch** – Highness/lowness of voice.
    Application: Use pitch changes to stress key ideas.

18. **Post-Event Surveys / Pre-Event Surveys** – Tools to measure expectations and satisfaction.
    Application: Gathering data for continuous improvement.

19. **Probing Questions** – Follow-ups for deeper insights.
    Application: "Can you give an example?"

20. **Public Speaking** – Live delivery of speeches to inform, inspire, persuade.

21. **Rhetorical Questions** – Asked for effect, not answers.
    Application: "Who doesn't want to feel safe?"

22. **Self-Assessment** – Reflecting on strengths and areas to improve.
    Application: Reviewing recordings of one's speech.

23. **Social Media Integration** – Using hashtags, live polls, or Q&A online.
    Application: Hybrid events that engage both live and virtual audiences.

24. **Storytelling** – Using narratives to build engagement and relatability.
    Application: Volunteer success story in donor communication.

25. **Technical Difficulties** – Issues with tech/equipment.
    Application: Always have a backup plan.

26. **Tone** – Quality of voice conveying emotion.
    Application: Warm tone to show empathy.

27. **Vocal Variety** – Changes in pitch, tone, volume, pace.
    Application: Prevents monotony, keeps audiences engaged.

28. **Visual Aids** – Slides, videos, props.
    Application: Use sparingly to reinforce key points.

29. **Voice Care** – Practices for vocal health.
    Application: Hydration, avoiding strain.

30. **Virtual Presentations** – Delivered digitally, requiring adapted methods.

31. **Volume** – Loudness/softness of delivery.
    Application: Louder in large rooms, softer for intimacy.

32. **Webinar** – Online seminar/workshop, often interactive.

Case Study

A regional non-profit in Southeast Asia hosted a **virtual presentation (webinar)** on youth leadership. By conducting a **pre-event survey**, they discovered participants wanted practical skills, not theory. The facilitator used **data visualization** (charts), **storytelling**

(youth success story), and **interactive elements** (polls, probing questions). With strong **vocal variety** and **non-verbal communication**, she built an **emotional connection**. A clear **call to action** invited attendees to join a mentorship program. Later, **post-event surveys** and **feedback forms** provided insights, while a **peer review** session helped refine delivery.

Common Challenges and Tips

- **Technical difficulties:** Always test equipment in advance and prepare offline alternatives.
- **Inclusivity gaps:** Adapt content for accessibility (captions, translations).
- **Overuse of visual aids:** Keep slides simple and avoid overwhelming data.
- **Pacing issues:** Use pauses to ensure clarity.
- **Voice strain:** Practice regular voice care and diaphragmatic breathing.

Reflection Questions

1. Which glossary terms do you find most relevant to your own speaking practice?
2. How can **audience personas** help you increase **cultural sensitivity** and **inclusivity**?
3. In what ways does **storytelling** create stronger **emotional connection** than statistics alone?
4. How can **self-assessment** and **peer review** complement **feedback forms**?

Limitations and Considerations

While the glossary is comprehensive, not all terms apply equally in every setting. Cultural norms, digital access, and audience diversity must guide selection. Over-reliance on structure can risk reducing authenticity; flexibility is key.

Academic Value

This glossary offers an integrated academic-practical reference, linking communication theory, rhetorical strategy, and real-world application. For scholars, it provides a pedagogical tool to teach public speaking. For practitioners, it delivers a ready-to-use resource for designing engaging and inclusive presentations.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Mastering the language of public speaking empowers practitioners to design, deliver, and evaluate more effective communication. Future directions include creating training modules for each concept and exploring cross-cultural adaptations of these terms.

Suggested Citation

Kazanskaia, A. N. (2025). *Teaching Paper: Glossary of Public Speaking and Audience Engagement Terms – Key Concepts for Effective, Inclusive, and Dynamic Presentations.* NEYA Global Publishing. https://doi.org/10.64357/neya-gjnps-eng-au-tp-tch-tp-05

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