



MANAGING A DIFFICULT AUDIENCE

LEVEL 4 PROJECT



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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.

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.

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.

Give the Role Play Assignments resource on page 19 to your club vice president education before your speech.

For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist on page 14.



Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. 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.

ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Evaluate your current skill level by rating each statement.



Select the appropriate number based on your skills today:

5
EXEMPLARY

4
EXCEL

3
ACCOMPLISHED

2
EMERGING

1
DEVELOPING

Pre-Project					Statement	Post-Project				
5	4	3	2	1	I am confident that I can recover after being interrupted during a presentation.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I can successfully defuse a disruption during a presentation.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am aware of the types of difficult audiences/individuals.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I recognize how this project applies to my life outside of Toastmasters.	5	4	3	2	1

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 MANAGE 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 six types of difficult audience members, each with a set of unique behaviors: the Talker, the Interrupter, the Chatterer, the Arguer, the Silent Type, and the Electronic Device Enthusiast.

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 him and call on another participant to comment.

The Interrupter

The Interrupter may believe she has 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. Write an outline on a flipchart or whiteboard showing the order of the topics you will cover. Check each one off as it's discussed.
4. Ask the Interrupter to complete a specific task, such as recording other participants' responses from a brainstorming activity on a flipchart.

The Chatterer

The Chatterer engages in individual conversations with other participants. He 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 his topic of conversation with the group.
2. Stop talking and look at the Chatterer until he is 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. She 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 her 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. He 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 he 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 Electronic Device Enthusiast

In some circumstances, audience members may be invited to post on social media, respond to questions using their devices, or access electronic content. In other instances, the use of any electronic device is inappropriate. State your expectations at the beginning of your presentation. It is appropriate to discourage any audience member behavior that interferes with another's experience.

Use the following strategies when you encounter an Electronic Device Enthusiast during your presentation.

1. Set clear expectations at the beginning of your presentation. Take your comfort level and the speech content into account when you make a decision about electronic devices during any speech.
2. Direct audience members to use electronic devices. A poll, streamed social media responses, and other opportunities to post feedback during your speech are examples of activities that involve audience members and their electronic devices.
3. If you prefer audience members to engage without the use of any electronic device, enlist them in an activity that requires their full concentration.
4. You cannot know what audience members are doing. They may be responding to a question or taking notes. Your best strategy may be to ignore the behavior and go on with your presentation.



The setting can affect how you handle an audience member who exhibits difficult behavior. It may not be a disruption for a person to be on her phone in a keynote or informative speech. It can, however, cause a major disruption if the same person is using her phone when you are leading a discussion group and need participation from everyone in attendance.

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 him effectively with minimal disruption to your speech.

Read the following questions and select the appropriate response.



1. Later in the presentation, you hear two audience members talking to one another. They are not saying anything that has to do with your presentation, and their volume is getting louder by the minute.

You should:

- Keep them engaged by asking them to participate in a learning activity.
- Paraphrase their comments in objective terms.
- Stop talking and look at them until they are quiet.
- Ask a question of the group and suggest that all participants share their opinions.

2. 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:

- Engage—this is the time to prove to your audience that you really know what you're talking about.
- Acknowledge the valid points, and then thank her for contributing.
- Remind her that you're the speaker and therefore have far more credibility.
- Ask her to speak with you later.

3. An audience member has been on his phone the entire presentation. You have invited social media responses from audience members, but it has been a few minutes and he hasn't looked up. You should:

- Ignore it and go on with your presentation. He may be finishing a response or engaged in an appropriate social media post.
- Restate the point being discussed and ask him for an opinion.
- Ask him a question that you are confident he can answer easily.
- Invite him to share what he is looking at with the group.

Answers: 1. Stop talking...; 2. Acknowledge the valid points...; 3. Ignore it and go on with your presentation...

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

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

Review: Return to page 3 to review your assignment.

Organize: Use the Project Checklist on page 14 to review the steps and add your own. This will help you organize and prepare your assignment.



Schedule: Work with the vice president education to schedule your speech.

Prepare: Prepare for your evaluation. Review the evaluation resources on pages 16–18 and share all resources with your evaluator before your speech. You may choose to share your evaluation resources online.



PROJECT CHECKLIST

Managing a Difficult Audience

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.

Give the Role Play Assignments resource on page 19 to your club vice president education before your speech.

This project includes:

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

Below are tasks you will need to complete for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You may alter the following list to incorporate any other tasks necessary for your project.

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.

After you have completed all components of the assignment, including your speech, return to page 4 to rate your skills in the post-project section.

Additional Notes

EVALUATION FORM

Managing a Difficult Audience

Member Name _____ Date _____

Evaluator _____ Speech Length: 10 – 15 minutes

Speech Title _____

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is for the member to practice the skills needed to address audience challenges when he or she presents outside of the Toastmasters club.

Notes for the Evaluator

During the completion of this project, the member spent time learning how to manage difficult audience members during a presentation.

About this speech:

- The member will deliver a 5- to 7-minute speech on any topic and practice responding to four audience member disruptions. The speech may be new or previously presented. You do not evaluate the speech or speech content.
- Your evaluation is based on the member's ability to address and defuse challenges presented by the audience. Audience members were assigned roles by the Toastmaster and/or vice president education prior to the meeting.
- Watch for professional behavior, respectful interactions with audience members, and the use of strategies to refocus the audience on the member's speech.
- The member has 10 to 15 minutes to deliver his or her 5- to 7-minute speech and respond to disrupters.

General Comments

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

5 EXEMPLARY	4 EXCELS	3 ACCOMPLISHED	2 EMERGING	1 DEVELOPING	
Clarity: Spoken language is clear and is easily understood					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Vocal Variety: Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Eye Contact: Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Gestures: Uses physical gestures effectively					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Audience Awareness: Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Comfort Level: Appears comfortable with the audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Interest: Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Effective Management: Demonstrates skill at engaging difficult audience members					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Professionalism: Remains professional regardless of difficult audience members					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Managing a Difficult Audience

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

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

ROLE PLAY ASSIGNMENTS

Instructions for the Toastmaster:

- Select any four of the five roles and assign each to a club member who will attend the meeting. (Note: The role of Electronic Device Enthusiast is not included here because there are presentations in which audience members are invited to post on social media, respond to questions using their devices, or access electronic content.)
- If possible, email this form to each selected member 2- to 3-days before the meeting. In your email, explain the purpose of the project and each assigned role. Also advise disrupters to avoid getting personal or antagonizing the speaker during their disruptions.
- The speaker should NOT know which members will participate in the role play and disrupt his or her speech.
- At the meeting, explain the purpose of the project to all in attendance. Clarify that this is a role-play assignment designed to help the speaker practice managing difficult audience members.

The Talker Member _____

You like to talk. You offer your opinion and comments on everything that anyone says, even when you have nothing substantive to contribute. After the speaker addresses you, you must stop your disruption. You may only disrupt the speaker once during the speech.

The Interrupter Member _____

You have something to contribute to the discussion, but prefer to do it only when someone else is talking. You break in to agree, disagree, or make another point. After the speaker addresses you, you must stop your disruption. You may only disrupt the speaker once during the speech.

The Chatterer Member _____

You like to make side comments to your neighbor, perhaps commenting on something being discussed or maybe talking about an entirely unrelated subject. After the speaker addresses you, you must stop your disruption. You may only disrupt the speaker once during the speech.

The Arguer Member _____

You know it all and feel obligated to share this extensive knowledge with others. You cannot understand when others don't agree with you and like to engage them in arguments to prove yourself. After the speaker addresses you, you must stop your disruption. You may only disrupt the speaker once during the speech.

The Silent Type Member _____

You are shy and avoid participating in group discussions for fear others will ridicule your ideas or you will embarrass yourself. After the speaker addresses you, you must stop your disruption. You may only disrupt the speaker once during the speech.

It is helpful for each member assigned a disrupter role to know the roles of other disrupters, however, one form can be cut into strips and distributed to each member with a role.



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