

Imagine that you are driving while listening to the radio and talking to a passenger sitting next to you. You are processing multiple sensory channels simultaneously. You are watching (the road), listening (to the radio and your friend), and thinking and talking. This doesn't sound too difficult. People process multiple sensory channels all the time. But there is a limit. The more channels you try to process at the same time, the trickier multichannel processing becomes. If one of the channels becomes complicated or difficult to process, then processing more than one channel can get very challenging. For example, what if there is a sudden storm while you are driving, and torrential rain makes it hard to see the road? It will start to get hard to pay attention to, or remember, what your friend is saying.

LISTENING AND READING DON'T MIX WELL

During a presentation, there are two sensory channels that are most active: visual and auditory. Your audience might be looking at you while also looking at your slides. They are also listening to what you're saying. If the slides are visuals that are easy to understand—such as photos, or diagrams that add extra context and meaning to the presentation—then the multiple channels are a positive experience for them. But if, instead, the slides are hard to read or complicated, then your audience will be distracted.

In particular, the sensory combination of slides that are filled with text and a speaker who is talking is simply a bad combination. In order to understand the slides, your audience has to read. As soon as they are reading, they are not listening. Listening and reading are two sensory channels that compete with each other. **Figure 40.1** shows an example of a slide with just brief summary text. **Figure 40.2** is a version of the slide that requires too much reading.

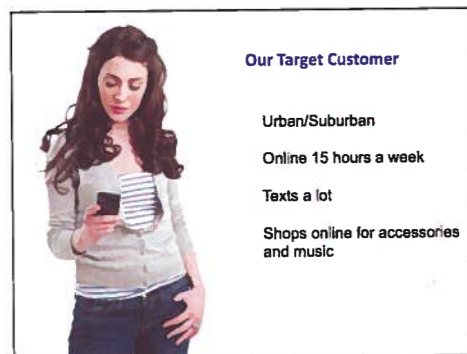


FIGURE 40.1 Less to read

What We Know About Our Target Customer	
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Between the age of 19 and 28, average age is 22
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 75% woman, 25% men
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lies in or near a large city in the US. May live inside the city limits, but most likely lives in a suburban location between 10-25 miles of downtown.
Online Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spends between 10-20 hours online each week Spends some time on a laptop Accesses content from a smart phone Primary means of communication is via text on smartphone
Online Shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 20% of shopping purchases are made online Primarily shops online for clothing accessories and for entertainment such as music Spends on average, \$20 a week shopping online

FIGURE 40.2 Too much for people to read

Takeaways

- * You don't *have* to use slides in a presentation. Put your presentation together without slides first, then decide if any of your points would be enhanced by the use of a visual example or illustration.
- * If you use slides, use them for simple photos, diagrams, or illustrations.
- * Don't put more than a few words of text on a slide. If people are reading, then they aren't listening to you.
- * Know what to call slides with a lot of text on them? Your notes! If you feel you need slides with text, it's probably because you need notes. Don't show the audience your notes.

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PEOPLE HAVE TO HEAR BEFORE THEY CAN LISTEN

You want people to listen to what you have to say and to take action on what you are presenting. But before they can listen, they have to hear what you are saying. You have to make sure that you are speaking loudly and clearly enough for your words to be heard and understood. People will quickly lose interest if they cannot hear you easily.

If you are speaking to a small or mid-sized group of people—for example, 40 or fewer—you may not think you need a microphone. You might be right if you can project your voice well, the room has good acoustic properties, and there isn't a lot of background noise such as fans from heating or cooling systems. If your host offers you a microphone, say yes. You can always choose not to use it if you decide the room is fine without it.

If you are giving a talk that is longer than an hour, you should consider using a microphone even if you are speaking in a good room to a medium-sized group. Even if you know how to project your voice, it can be a strain on your vocal cords to do so over an extended period of time.



Always turn the microphone off during breaks

It doesn't happen very often, but it's possible. I actually know of a situation where the speaker did not turn off the lapel microphone, the sound engineer didn't turn it off at the booth, and the restroom was right next to the meeting room—within range. Everyone in the auditorium was able to hear the sounds of the restroom break.

BE PREPARED

Show up early and evaluate the room. If possible bring a friend with you and ask the friend to walk around the room while you are talking to see if you can be heard; if you are using a microphone, make sure the volume is right. In some venues there will be a sound professional on hand to set things up and check how it all sounds. If there is a microphone set up but no one is around, ask if there is a sound technician you can talk to.

Practice ahead of time with a voice recorder and listen to yourself. Are you speaking loud enough? Are you articulating or mumbling?

Takeaways

- * Don't be afraid to ask for a microphone.
- * If you are using a microphone, ask for a sound technician and/or bring a friend with you and ask them to walk around to different areas of the room to make sure you can be heard everywhere.
- * Show up early so you can check out the room and sound system ahead of time if possible.
- * Listen to your voice with a voice recorder to see if you are speaking loudly and clearly enough.