

WEEK 3 LECTURE NOTES

Audience Analysis for International Business Presentations MIB1302: English Communication Skills for International Business

Course	MIB1302 English Communication Skills for International Business
Week / Topic	Week 3: Audience Analysis for International Business Presentations
CLOs Addressed	CLO1 (Primary) - Understand presentation practices and strategies CLO4 (Secondary) - Demonstrate professional communication ethics and cultural sensitivity
Duration	3 Hours (180 minutes)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain the purpose and components of audience analysis in business presentations
- Identify different audience types and their characteristics in international business contexts
- Apply the AUDIENCE framework to analyze a specific business audience
- Describe how Hofstede's cultural dimensions and high-context vs. low-context styles shape international business presentation expectations
- Apply cultural sensitivity principles and professional communication ethics when adapting presentations for international audiences

Part 1: Why Audience Analysis Matters

1.1 The Fundamental Principle

Every effective business presentation begins not with what you want to say, but with who you are saying it to. Audience analysis is the process of systematically gathering and interpreting information about your audience before, during, and after a presentation. It is the cornerstone of effective communication in international business.

Consider this scenario: An international technology company is launching a new AI software product. The same product manager is presenting to three completely different audiences this week:

- Group A: The company's Board of Directors (senior executives, high financial literacy, time-pressured)

- Group B: A team of new graduate employees (low financial literacy, eager to learn, need context)
- Group C: A delegation of American venture capital investors visiting for the first time (direct, ROI-focused, low-context communication style)

The data is identical. The presentation must be completely different. This is the power and necessity of audience analysis.

1.2 Consequences of Poor Audience Analysis

What Happens Without Audience Analysis	Business Impact
Using too much technical jargon	Audience loses interest; key message missed
Pitching too basic to experts	Loss of credibility; wasted time
Ignoring cultural norms	Offense, misunderstanding, failed deals
Wrong level of formality	Inappropriate tone damages relationships
Misreading decision-maker needs	Proposal rejected; opportunity lost

1.3 Benefits of Thorough Audience Analysis

- Increases persuasiveness - you speak directly to what the audience cares about
- Reduces miscommunication - language and examples are appropriate to the audience
- Builds credibility - showing you understand your audience earns trust
- Saves time - focused content avoids unnecessary material
- Improves outcomes - presentations achieve their intended purpose more reliably

Part 2: The AUDIENCE Framework

A practical tool for systematic audience analysis is the AUDIENCE framework. Each letter represents a key dimension to investigate before preparing your presentation.

The AUDIENCE Framework
A - Age & Demographics: Who are they? What are their backgrounds?
U - Understanding: What do they already know about your topic?
D - Decision Makers: Who has the power to act on your recommendation?
I - Interests: What do they care about most? What are their priorities?
E - Expectations: What format, length, and style do they anticipate?
N - Needs: What problem are they trying to solve? What information do they require?

The AUDIENCE Framework

C - Cultural Background: What cultural norms shape their communication preferences?

E - Emotional State: How do they feel about the topic? Are they resistant, neutral, or supportive?

2.1 A - Age and Demographics

Demographics are the observable characteristics of your audience. They provide the foundation for other analysis dimensions.

Demographic Factor	Presentation Implications
Age / Generation	Younger audiences may expect interactive, visual formats; senior executives often prefer structured, data-driven approaches
Professional Background	Finance professionals expect ROI data; marketing teams respond to brand narratives and customer stories
Education Level	Determines appropriate vocabulary, depth of explanation, and use of technical terminology
Organizational Rank	Senior leaders want strategic summaries; operational staff need implementation details
International Experience	Globally experienced audiences need less cultural context; domestic audiences may need more explanation of international factors

2.2 U - Understanding (Knowledge Level)

Accurately calibrating to your audience's knowledge level is one of the most critical and challenging aspects of presentation design. Misjudging this dimension in either direction undermines your effectiveness.

The Three Knowledge Levels

Knowledge Level	How to Present
Expert (High Knowledge)	Use technical terminology freely. Skip foundational explanations. Focus on nuanced analysis, new findings, or advanced implications. Peer-to-peer tone.
Informed Non-Expert (Moderate Knowledge)	Use some technical terms but define the most specialized ones. Provide enough context without being condescending. Professional but accessible tone.
Novice (Low Knowledge)	Avoid jargon entirely or explain it immediately. Use analogies and concrete examples. Build from foundational concepts progressively. Patient, clear tone.

2.3 D - Decision Makers

In business presentations, understanding who holds decision-making power is essential. Your primary audience may not be the ultimate decision maker. Identify:

- Primary decision maker: The person with authority to approve, fund, or implement
- Influencers: Those who advise or can sway the decision maker
- Gatekeepers: Those who control access to the decision maker
- Implementers: Those who will carry out the decision

Tailor your core message and call to action to resonate with the decision maker, while ensuring other audience segments also find value in your content.

2.4 I - Interests and Priorities

People process information through the filter of their own interests. Effective presenters frame their content in terms of what the audience values most.

Audience Role	Typical Interests and Priorities
C-Suite Executives (CEO, CFO)	Return on investment, risk management, competitive advantage, strategic alignment
Department Managers	Operational efficiency, team impact, resource requirements, implementation feasibility
Technical Teams	Accuracy of specifications, process details, technical feasibility, data quality
Clients / Customers	Value for money, reliability, ease of use, how it solves their specific problem
Investors	Financial returns, market opportunity, risk profile, management capability
Government / Regulatory Bodies	Compliance, public interest, transparency, legal considerations

2.5 E - Expectations

Every audience arrives with expectations about the presentation format, length, formality, and interactivity. Violating these expectations - even with excellent content - can undermine your effectiveness.

- Format expectations: Slide-based? Written report? Verbal only?
- Length: Executive presentations are typically 10-20 minutes; training sessions may be 60+ minutes
- Formality: Corporate board = formal; startup team = informal and collaborative
- Interactivity: Some audiences expect Q&A throughout; others prefer it at the end

- Evidence standards: Some audiences expect extensive data; others value case studies and narratives

2.6 N - Needs

The needs dimension asks: What does this audience need from this presentation to move forward? Needs can be informational (they need facts), decisional (they need to make a choice), or motivational (they need to be inspired to act).

Always answer your audience's implicit question: 'What's in it for me (or my organization)?' This is known as the WIIFM principle. When you address WIIFM, your audience stays engaged and receptive.

2.7 C - Cultural Background

For international business presentations, cultural background is perhaps the most complex and consequential dimension of audience analysis. This is explored in depth in Part 3.

2.8 E - Emotional State

Audiences rarely arrive in a neutral emotional state. They may be:

- Supportive: Already in agreement; need confirmation and a clear path forward
- Neutral: Open but uncommitted; need compelling evidence and clear reasoning
- Resistant: Skeptical or opposed; need you to acknowledge their concerns before presenting your case
- Anxious: Worried about change or risk; need reassurance and clear risk mitigation

Knowing the emotional state of your audience helps you decide where to place your strongest arguments and how to frame your opening remarks.

Part 3: Cultural Dimensions in International Business

This section addresses CLO4: Professional Communication Ethics and Cultural Sensitivity. Understanding cultural context is not merely a communication technique — it is a professional and ethical obligation for any international business presenter.

When presenting to international audiences, cultural background shapes not just communication preferences but fundamental assumptions about what a good presentation looks like. The most widely used research framework for understanding cultural differences in business is Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory.

3.0 Cultural Self-Awareness: Know Your Own Baseline Before Adapting for Others

A critical but often overlooked first step in cultural adaptation is understanding your OWN cultural defaults. Every presenter carries a set of assumptions — about formality, directness, relationship-building, and hierarchy — that feel 'natural' because they reflect the norms of their upbringing.

These defaults become visible only when we step outside our own cultural context and encounter different expectations.

This section applies equally to every student, regardless of nationality. The goal is not to stereotype any culture, but to develop the professional self-awareness that enables you to adapt your communication intentionally.

3.0a Key Questions Every International Business Presenter Must Ask Themselves

Before preparing any international business presentation, reflect honestly on how your own cultural background shapes these six communication behaviors:

Communication Behavior	Typical Cultural Variation	Why It Matters for Presenters
How do I open a presentation?	High-context cultures often open with relationship acknowledgment. Low-context cultures expect an immediate agenda and key message.	An opening that feels warm and respectful in one culture may feel indirect and slow in another.
How directly do I state my opinion?	Some cultures expect bold, direct recommendations. Others expect suggestions framed diplomatically or through questions.	Being too direct can seem aggressive; being too indirect can seem evasive — depending on the audience.
How do I address seniority and authority?	Many Asian and Middle Eastern cultures expect formal titles and deference to hierarchy. Northern European and North American cultures are often more egalitarian.	Failing to address a senior person appropriately can signal disrespect. Over-formality in an egalitarian culture can create distance.
What does silence mean to me?	In many East Asian cultures, silence signals thoughtful consideration and respect. In many Western cultures, silence signals confusion or disagreement.	Misreading silence during Q&A can cause presenters to over-explain, interrupt, or draw incorrect conclusions about audience reception.
Do I use 'we' or 'I' language?	Collectivist cultures (common in Asia, Latin America, Africa) naturally use group framing. Individualist cultures (common in North America, Australia, Western Europe) expect personal ownership.	Framing all achievements as 'our team' may undermine your credibility in individualist contexts. Excessive 'I' may seem self-centred in collectivist contexts.
How much data do I expect to provide?	High uncertainty avoidance cultures (Japan, Germany, South Korea) expect detailed evidence and documented precision. Low UAI cultures (Singapore, UK) may prefer concise summaries.	Providing too little data risks being seen as unprepared; too much data can overwhelm an audience that prefers high-level strategy.

3.0b Cultural Concepts Worth Knowing for International Business Presentations

Different cultures have culturally-embedded concepts that shape business communication behavior. While you should never assume every individual from a culture fits these patterns, understanding them helps you anticipate possible audience expectations. The following concepts recur frequently in international business settings:

Face and Public Dignity

Many cultures — particularly across East and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Latin America — place high value on maintaining the public dignity of individuals. This is often described as 'face' (a concept that exists in various forms in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and other cultures). The key principle: never put someone in a position where they must publicly admit error, ignorance, or weakness.

Presentation behaviors that PROTECT dignity	Presentation behaviors that RISK dignity
Acknowledge the senior person's contributions and status at the opening	Criticizing or correcting someone openly during the presentation
Frame negative findings diplomatically: 'There are opportunities to improve...'	Pointing out a gap in someone's knowledge in front of their team
Allow Q&A time where answers are not mandatory — let people choose to engage	Asking direct questions that may expose gaps in front of peers
Send sensitive materials in advance so people can prepare responses privately	Publicly disagreeing with a decision that has already been approved by leadership

Presentation implication: This is not about dishonesty — it is about framing. The same factual information can be delivered in a way that empowers the audience or embarrasses them. Professional communicators choose to empower.

Relationship Before Business

In many high-context cultures (across Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and parts of Southern Europe), trust and relationship are considered prerequisites for productive business discussion — not an optional extra. Jumping directly into an agenda without any acknowledgment of the relationship can seem transactional or even rude.

- In many business cultures, small talk, shared meals, and personal rapport-building are legitimate and important parts of the presentation context — not a delay before the 'real' meeting.
- In lower-context, time-conscious cultures (Northern Europe, North America), excessive relationship-building before getting to business can seem inefficient.
- A practical middle ground: acknowledge any shared history or relationship briefly (1-2 sentences), express genuine appreciation for the audience's time, then transition to business content clearly.

Presentation implication: Neither approach is more 'professional' — they are culturally different. The ethical responsibility is to research your audience's expectations and adapt accordingly, rather than imposing your own cultural norms.

Hierarchy and Decision-Making Authority

In high power distance cultures (many Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American contexts), hierarchy is not merely organizational — it carries social and moral weight. Presentations must be sensitive to this.

- In high PDI cultures, the most senior person in the room may be the sole decision-maker. Others may not speak freely in front of them, and direct challenge of ideas is rare in public settings.
- In low PDI cultures (Scandinavia, Netherlands, Australia), all participants may be expected to contribute opinions regardless of seniority, and questioning the presenter is a sign of engagement — not disrespect.
- For international presenters: identify who in the room holds decision-making authority BEFORE the presentation. Structure your opening and key arguments to address their specific concerns.

3.0c Practical Self-Reflection Exercise

Before completing the Week 3 assignment, use the Hofstede Country Comparison Tool to look up your OWN country's cultural dimension scores. Then answer the following questions in your notes:

Reflection Question	Think About...	Connection to Presentations
What is my country's PDI score?	Do I naturally show deference to seniority? Do I expect others to challenge me openly?	How might this affect how I address a mixed-seniority international audience?
What is my country's IDV score?	Do I naturally use 'we' or 'I' language? Do I credit individuals or teams?	How should I adjust framing when speaking to high- or low-IDV audiences?
What is my country's UAI score?	Do I prepare exhaustive data, or do I prefer concise overviews?	How much evidence and documentation does my target audience expect?
Is my culture high-context or low-context?	Do I rely on implied meaning, tone, and relationship? Or explicit words?	How explicit do I need to be in my verbal and written communication?

3.1 Hofstede's Six Cultural Dimensions

Dimension 1: Power Distance (PDI)

Power Distance measures the degree to which less powerful members of an organization accept and expect unequal power distribution.

High Power Distance (e.g., China 80, Malaysia 100, Russia 93)	Low Power Distance (e.g., Germany 35, Netherlands 38, Australia 36)
Formal titles and hierarchy must be respected in presentations	First-name basis is acceptable; informal atmosphere is comfortable
Decisions rarely made in the room; approval comes from senior leadership	Decisions may be made collaboratively during or immediately after the presentation
Questioning the presenter may be seen as disrespectful	Audience actively questions and challenges - this is positive engagement
Status of the presenter matters greatly (credentials, seniority)	Content quality matters more than the presenter's status

Dimension 2: Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)

Individualist Cultures (e.g., USA 91, UK 89, Australia 90)	Collectivist Cultures (e.g., China 20, South Korea 18, Vietnam 20)
Appeal to individual achievement and personal gain	Emphasize group harmony and collective benefit
Direct communication: state your point clearly and early	Indirect communication: context and relationship come first
'I' framing: 'I recommend...' 'My analysis shows...'	'We' framing: 'Our team has found...' 'Together we can...'
Conflict and disagreement expressed openly	Disagreement expressed indirectly; 'yes' may mean 'I understand' not 'I agree'

Dimension 3: Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)

High Uncertainty Avoidance (e.g., South Korea 85, Japan 92, France 86)	Low Uncertainty Avoidance (e.g., China 30, Singapore 8, Denmark 23)
Provide extensive data, evidence, and risk analyses	High-level summaries are sufficient; excessive detail feels like distrust
Avoid ambiguous language; be precise and specific	Ambiguity is acceptable; broad visions are motivating
Present worst-case scenarios alongside best-case	Focus on opportunities; too much caution seems pessimistic
Formal written documentation expected alongside verbal presentation	Verbal presentations with flexible follow-up preferred

Dimension 4: Long-Term Orientation (LTO)

Long-Term Oriented (e.g., China 87, South Korea 100, Japan 88)	Short-Term Oriented (e.g., USA 26, Nigeria 13, Australia 21)
Emphasize long-term relationships, patience, and future planning	Emphasize immediate results, quick wins, and short payback periods
Investment in relationship-building before business content	Get to business content quickly; relationship-building happens in parallel
Show how your proposal aligns with long-term organizational goals	Show immediate ROI and near-term measurable outcomes
Persistence and gradual progress are valued	Speed and efficiency are highly valued

3.2 High-Context vs. Low-Context Communication Styles

Beyond Hofstede, Edward Hall's distinction between high-context and low-context communication is essential for international business presenters.

High-Context Communication (e.g., China, Japan, South Korea, Middle East)	Low-Context Communication (e.g., USA, Germany, Netherlands, Scandinavia)
Meaning is embedded in context, tone, and non-verbal cues	Meaning is explicit and contained in the words themselves
Indirect language; what is not said is as important as what is said	Direct language; clarity and explicitness are valued
Building rapport and trust precedes business content	Business content is primary; social chat is brief
Written agreements may be less important than relationships	Written contracts and documentation are essential
'Yes' may mean 'I hear you' rather than 'I agree'	'Yes' means 'I agree and will act accordingly'

3.3 Practical Adaptations for International Presentations

When presenting to international audiences, consider these evidence-based adaptations:

- Language pace: Speak 20-30% slower than your normal pace when presenting in English to non-native speakers
- Vocabulary: Avoid idioms, slang, and colloquialisms (e.g., instead of 'hit it out of the park,' say 'achieved outstanding results')
- Humor: Humor is highly culture-specific; when in doubt, keep presentations professional and neutral in tone
- Visual support: Use more visual aids (charts, diagrams, images) to support verbal explanations for audiences with varying English proficiency levels

- **Silence:** In many Asian cultures, silence after a question is a sign of respect and thoughtful consideration, not confusion or disagreement
 - **Eye contact:** Direct eye contact signals confidence in Western cultures but may be considered aggressive or disrespectful in some Asian and Middle Eastern contexts
 - **Formality:** Always err on the side of greater formality when uncertain about cultural norms
-

Part 4: Adapting Your Presentation

4.1 The Adaptation Process

Audience analysis is only valuable if it drives concrete adaptations in your presentation. The adaptation process involves three key areas:

Content Adaptation

- **Depth:** How much detail and technical complexity is appropriate?
- **Examples:** Use case studies and examples that are geographically and culturally relevant to your audience
- **Data vs. narrative:** Data-focused audiences need hard evidence; relationship-focused audiences respond better to case studies and testimonials
- **Structure:** Some audiences expect a strong opening argument; others expect extensive background before the main point

Language Adaptation

- **Vocabulary level:** Match your word choices to the audience's level of English proficiency and domain expertise
- **Formality register:** Use formal language (full sentences, professional vocabulary, proper titles) for senior or high-power-distance audiences
- **Active vs. passive voice:** Active voice is clearer for all audiences; passive voice can sound evasive
- **Signposting:** Use explicit signposting ('I will now move to...' 'Let me summarize...') especially for international audiences

Delivery Adaptation

- **Pace:** Slower for non-native English speakers; energetic and dynamic for informal audiences
- **Visual support:** More slides with less text for international audiences; fewer slides with more depth for expert audiences
- **Interactivity:** Gauge whether the audience expects to participate or observe
- **Body language:** Research cultural norms for gestures, eye contact, and physical space

4.2 The Audience Analysis Planning Template

Use this template to structure your audience analysis before every significant business presentation:

AUDIENCE Dimension	Key Questions to Ask	Impact on Presentation
Age & Demographics	Who will be in the room? What is their professional background and seniority?	Determines formality, vocabulary level, and depth of context needed
Understanding	What do they already know? What do they not know? What are their misconceptions?	Shapes what to explain vs. skip; prevents over- or under-explaining
Decision Makers	Who can say yes? Who influences the decision? Who implements?	Determines where to place your strongest arguments and call to action
Interests	What are their professional priorities? What do they worry about?	Shapes framing, examples, and how benefits are described
Expectations	What format, length, and level of formality do they expect?	Determines slide count, presentation style, and Q&A approach
Needs	What do they need to accomplish after this presentation?	Shapes the call to action and what supporting materials to provide
Cultural Background	What cultural dimensions are relevant? High/low context? Power distance?	Shapes language, structure, eye contact, silence, and formality decisions
Emotional State	How do they currently feel about the topic? Are they supportive, neutral, or resistant?	Determines where to place concessions, acknowledgments, and strongest evidence

Lesson Summary

This week's lesson established the foundation for audience-centered presentation design. Key takeaways:

- Audience analysis is the systematic process of gathering information about your audience before preparing your presentation. It is not an optional step - it is the essential first step.

- The AUDIENCE framework (Age/Demographics, Understanding, Decision Makers, Interests, Expectations, Needs, Cultural Background, Emotional State) provides a comprehensive structure for audience analysis.
- Hofstede's cultural dimensions - Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long-Term Orientation - directly shape international business communication expectations.
- High-context vs. low-context communication styles require fundamentally different presentation approaches in terms of directness, relationship-building, and the role of non-verbal communication.
- Content, language, and delivery must all be adapted based on audience analysis findings. Analysis without adaptation provides no benefit.

Connection to Previous and Upcoming Lessons

Week 2 (Previous)	Week 4 (Upcoming)
PREP Method provides the structural framework for organizing content	Slide design must also be adapted to audience expectations
Presentation structure (intro-body-conclusion) must be adapted for different audiences	Visual language carries cultural meaning - colors, images, and layouts have different implications
Signposting language helps international audiences follow your structure	Delivery skills: voice, pacing, and body language in cross-cultural contexts

References and Further Reading

- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Hall, E.T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. Anchor Books.
- Reynolds, G. (2012). *Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery* (2nd ed.). New Riders.
- Harvard Business Review. (2013). How to Give a Killer Presentation. <https://hbr.org/2013/06/how-to-give-a-killer-presentation>
- Hofstede Insights - Country Comparison Tool: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/>
- The Culture Factor Group - 6-D Model of National Culture: <https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/>