Overview:

The ability to adapt the way we communicate to different audiences is an important skill. The purpose of this activity is for teams to work creatively to develop the best way to pitch a project to a specific audience in order to practice adaptive communication skills key to intercultural competence.

Background and Information:

This activity was adapted from Talk2U's storytelling exercise by Dr. H.E. Parker of Purdue University.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Analyze how to effectively appeal to and engage with various audiences.

2. Develop different platforms for conveying a message depending on the target audience (e.g. oral tale, TikTok video, illustration, a cartoon, a stand up monologue, skit).

3. Draw conclusions about the difficulties of pitching complex ideas to audiences that may not be familiar with specific content.

Time:

30-40 minutes (depending on the number of groups)

Group Size:

Small group/teams

Materials:

Instructions, projects/case studies, and audience profiles.

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication:

- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.

Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks:

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

Activity Instructions:

This activity works best with small groups. If the class is teams/project-based course, they can work in their usual teams.

The facilitator begins by explaining the premise of the activity: Teams have to pitch their project to different stakeholders/audiences. They also have to creatively decide which mode of communication is best to pitch their project based on the audience. The end product can be an oral tale, a TikTok video, an illustration, a cartoon, a stand up monologue, a skit, a brief PowerPoint presentation, etc.

- In a teams or project-based class: this activity is done with the current teams and using their current projects (see example from an Engineering project-based class below).
- If the class is not project-based, the facilitator selects specific projects/case studies relevant to the class/field.
- The facilitator selects different audience profiles for each pitch (see sample profiles below) and randomly assigns an audience member to each team.
- Based on the audience, the teams come up with a creative way of pitching the project that is engaging and also uses storytelling premises (see guidelines below).

The teams will have 8-10 minutes to develop their pitch and 3-5 minutes to share their pitch with the class. They should be ready to explain the rationale for their pitch and the following creative storytelling guidelines:

Engage with your audience

- Create a portrait of your audience: what they think, like, dislike, believe, want or do in their everyday life.
- Work on insights, impressions, habits, issues, assumptions, beliefs, pains and lifestyle.

Premises to guide your work

- Simple, say enough. Not too much or too little, just enough.
- Focus of story
- Emotion ignites images
- Different people react to different stimuli
- Beware of assumption / presumption

Considerations to keep in mind

- Meaning, format, tone, delivery, credibility, emotional twist, clarity, engagement.

Sample projects and audience profiles follow. The next page can be used as a learner handout, or the facilitator can create their own slide or handout to assign pairings to small groups.

Adapt your Pitch

The following projects are real student-driven projects in a global engineering class. The projects address one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and they focus on a specific region/population. In addition to providing a technical solution, these project teams had to consider ways to engage the local community, including getting a better understanding of the culture's norms and expectations. For this activity, groups need to create a brief pitch appealing to the specified audience AND decide on the best platform/medium for the pitch.
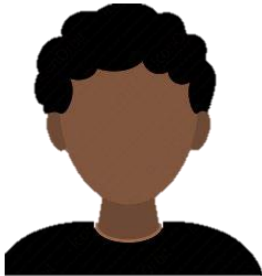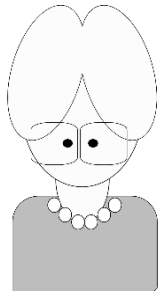

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Selecting Harmoniously Working Native Plant Communities to Sequestrate Carbon in Los Angeles Lawns (USA)

Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

Clean Water for the Wayúu Tribes (Colombia)

Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

Renewable energy to generate electricity in elementary school (Boyayá, Colombia)

Audience: 4 year-old, Hispanic girl Only child. Likes cats and dolphins. Dreams of being a detective. Hates bananas and carrots. Wants to live in a tree house. Expert at baking cookies.	Audience: 13 year-old African American. Middle child. Likes pizza and anime. Dreams of having 250k followers on TikTok. Hates waking up early. Wants to visit Japan. Expert at drawing.	Audience: 52 year-old woman, Ukrainian. Mother of three. Likes her job as a pediatric nurse. Dreams of vacationing abroad. Hates crumbs. Wants to have her own rose garden. Expert at Sudoku.

If your learners are not STEM-oriented and won't relate well to the example above, feel free to create more appropriate case-audience pairings for your learning context. For instance, you might pair products and consumer groups, or policies and communities, or self-care behaviors and demographic groups. Some tips for designing effective pairings: The pairs should be unexpected (don't be afraid to use humor), creating the pitch should demand adaptation from common messaging, and the audience representative should be human and complex rather than stereotypical.

Debriefing Questions:

1. How did your team choose the type of delivery for your pitch (presentation, TikTok, illustration, etc.)?

2. What did your team find most challenging about adapting your pitch to this particular audience member?

3. Thinking about the different audience members included in this activity, which do you think is harder to engage and why?

4. What did you learn about adapting your pitch to different audiences? How can this skill be useful in your personal and professional life?

Related Tools:

Adapt or Be Yourself

Adaptation Scenarios

Communication Flexibility Scale

Revised Sociocultural Adaptation Scale

Sociocultural Adaptation Scale

Tuning Your Messages