



THE UNIVERSAL ACCREDITATION BOARD ACCREDITATION STUDY COURSE

PUBLICS AND PUBLIC OPINION

Session **2**

Overview

This session of the Accreditation Study Course is designed to deliver information on identifying and organizing publics and observing public opinion.

► **Reading to be assigned BEFORE this session**

- Publics and Public Opinion
 - > The concept of publics
 - > Definition, the public at large, special publics
- Public opinion, attitudes, values, beliefs
 - > How opinions and attitudes are formed
- Segments 5.2 and 5.8, 6.1 and 6.8, Detailed list of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities tested, Candidate's Preparation Guide for the Examination for Accreditation in Public Relations.

Special Note for Coach

If you have not been coaching recently, please review these preliminary materials: For You, the Coach; The Coaching Method; Managing the Class; About House Rules. Before the day of the class, make sure you are familiar with the content in the reading which candidates should have done, and with the exercises you are going to conduct in this session. Consider any adjustments you may need to make if this is a free-standing unit, or is part of a sequence of preparation classes.

► **Significance of Subject Matter**

- Identifying and communicating with groups who are significant in your work are essential aspects of planning, which is 30 percent of the multiple-choice Examination, and of management, another 10 percent. These skills also will be reflected in your Readiness Review.

► **Handouts for this session**

- Public Relations: An Overview (PRSA Foundation Monograph)
 - The Publics of Public Relations – Handout #2d
 - Public Opinion Process – Lang and Lang – Handout #6
 - “The Tipping Point” – Handout #7
 - Calisthenics #1 – Audiences – Handout #4
 - Calisthenics #2 – End Result – Handout #5
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- ▶ **Visual Aids needed for this session**
 - House Rules – Visual #1 (if desired)
 - Public Opinion Process: Lang and Lang – Visual #3
- ▶ **Other materials needed for this session**
 - Projection equipment for visual aids.
- ▶ **Exercises conducted during this session**
 - Identifying Publics
 - Organizing Publics
 - Public Opinion
- ▶ **New lecture material to be delivered during this session**
 - Public Opinion
 - Attitudes

I. Agenda for Session

Instructions: Announce agenda, post on flip chart paper or create visual if desired

2-3 minutes

- Start thinking about publics or audiences
- Public opinion
- Attitudes

II. Concept of Publics

Instructions: Coach introduces discussion.

Allow 12-15 minutes

- ▶ **Check for understanding:**
 - > Is the concept of publics familiar to you?
 - > If not, ask a class member to explain
 - ▶ **Ask:**
 - > How do you use it in your own work?
 - > In your job, who are your publics?
 - ▶ **Invite** response from each candidate in turn.
 - > Briefly contribute any additional information needed on different ways to segment – age, interests, gender, occupation, experience, avenues of contact, broad and narrow categories.
- For example:
- Broad: likely voters in a general election
 - Narrow: Women business owners with between 10 and 50 employees who have been in business for at least five years.

III. Exercises: Publics*Instructions: Present this situation orally:**Allow 15 minutes*

- ▶ You are working for an automobile maker in this country when *Consumer Reports*¹ rates your sports utility vehicle “Not acceptable” because of its “pronounced tendency to roll over in our emergency handling tests.”
 - > Who are your publics? (Just the publics, now; not strategies for them)
 - Take 3 minutes for notes and share in usual fashion (Who'll give one public, how many agree, etc. See “The Coaching Method” section for more information.)
 - Probe for dealers, owners, owners of your company's other vehicles, prospects, employees, stockholders, analysts, regulatory officials (safety), other consumer groups, trade press, dealers in other lines and makes, devotees of sports utility vehicles . . .
- ▶ **Run through** some of the following situations quickly, eliciting spontaneous responses.
 - > Consider a merger of two hospitals or medical centers.
 - Who are your publics in this instance?
 - > Now consider a merger of two retailers.
 - Who are your publics?
 - > Observe how the publics they identify are changing as they tackle different situations.
 - > What about the New Orleans Port Authority when a tanker crashed into the river walk mall?
 - > A mega merger such as Boeing, McDonnell Douglas?
 - > A merger of utility companies?
 - > Consolidation of two public schools or school districts?
 - > Merger or affiliation of two colleges – one previously men only; the other women only?
- ▶ Repeat observation – how some audiences are consistent in various situations; others are added or subtracted depending on the nature of the organization(s) involved.

IV. Ways of Organizing Publics*Instructions: Coach guides discussion and exercise**Two sections, 30 minutes*

- ▶ Open a general discussion by asking: *Allow 15 minutes*
 - > How do you usually organize your own publics or audiences in writing a plan or setting up a campaign?
- ▶ Guide discussion to probe for:
 - > Internal, external
 - > Functional
 - > Segmentation
 - Geographic
 - Psychographics

- ▶ *How can you find the segments you want?* [GET RESPONSE FROM CLASS]
 - ZIP codes
 - Targeted publications
 - Affinity groups
 - Databases

- ▶ *Point out that segmentation will receive more attention in a session on planning.*

- ▶ *Emphasize* that identifying audiences is a very basic step in planning a public relations approach to a problem or situation. The system is to identify the audiences or publics, decide what you want from each group, write an objective specifying how much of that outcome you hope to accomplish by what time, then move on into how you are going to do that, and how you will measure the results.
 - > This is a forecast of work to come in later sessions, or in individual study
 - > It's good to start thinking in terms of audiences or publics, whenever you see an exercise or a situation

- ▶ *Add:* Here is a handout (#2d) that is useful as a starting point in organizing your publics. Hand out "The Publics of Public Relations"
 - Questions about this?

- ▶ EXERCISE: Now for a little practice: *Allow 15 minutes*

- ▶ *Announce the exercise orally:*
 - > A large insurance company's home office draws clerical employees from a 50- to 75-mile radius. It wants to organize commuter van pools to minimize the cost and effort of transportation, reduce absenteeism in bad weather and attract new staff as needed. It will subsidize the vans and necessary licensing for designated drivers.
 - > How can you locate the prospect groups?
 - > Allow two minutes; draw responses by standard method.
 - Probe for work site posters, employee zip codes, posting in internal/external high-traffic areas, key contacts . . .
 - Probe for seeking methods for self-selection as well as employer initiative.

Elapsed: 1:00

V. Attitudes*Instructions: Coach presents material.**Allow 20-30 minutes*

NOTE TO COACH: It may be helpful to have a university faculty member who teaches this topic sit in on this discussion, and verify or clarify the understandings which appear. If such a person is not readily available, don't avoid the segment. Use the dictionary definitions noted below, exercise your own judgment, and if the class is in doubt, instruct them to research it.

- ▶ **Inquire** how many in the class have done their reading on this topic.
 - > If some are delinquent, let others take the lead.
 - > Remind the delinquents to catch up; they need to know this.

- ▶ **Coach opens discussion.** Notice an attractive garment being worn by one of the class:
 - > **Ask:** Do any of you have an opinion about what [name] is wearing?
 - Take oral comments, briefly.
 - > Suppose you are told that the [sweater, shirt, whatever] was made by child labor in a sweatshop in a foreign country. Does that make a difference in your opinion?
 - Take oral comments, briefly, then continue:
 - > Now suppose, instead, that you learn that [person] made this garment himself/her self and possibly that he/she also designed it -- it is an original. What does that do to your opinion?
 - Take a few oral comments.
 - > **Comment:** Now observe what is happening here. You had an original opinion about that garment. Given additional facts, your opinion shifted. What makes the difference?
 - Look for comments that the facts conflict or align with attitudes or values. If necessary, probe for that relationship. What attitudes or values underlie the reaction against child labor? Sweatshop? Foreign country? Hand-made by the wearer? Original design?
 - How many of those underlying factors are attitudes? How many are values?

NOTE TO COACH: If the class has trouble distinguishing between attitudes and values, the simplest way out of the situation is to cite Webster:

“Attitude: a) a mental position with regard to a fact or state; b) a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state”

“Value: something intrinsically valuable or desirable”; something esteemed.

Effective Public Relations makes technical distinctions between attitude and opinion. Other texts may do something similar. Don't get bogged down in technicalities. We don't want recitation here so much as the candidates' own evaluation of influences.

- > Draw on this list only if necessary to generate analysis and understanding:
 - Possible attitude: Buy American!
 - Possible differing attitude: foreign trade is advantageous
 - Possible value: Reward/respect enterprise
 - Possible value: Develop talent and initiative
 - Value conflict: exploitation of child labor
 - Value conflict: unfair competition with American labor
 - > **Comment:** There are no right answers here; our purpose only is to establish the fact that opinions change when facts conflict with or align with values and beliefs.
 - > **Ask:** Anyone have another example of what happens when new facts appear and opinion shifts? If no takers, continue:
 - What about a respected public official who is accused of misusing tax funds for his/her own benefit? Gold-plated fixtures in the private lavatory, road to a country residence paved at public expense, whatever . . . What happens to opinions about that person?
 - Now suppose we find the official is falsely accused; the whistle-blower was blackmailing the official? What happens to opinions?
 - > Purpose of all this: Be alert to the movement of public opinion and the underlying influences.
- ▶ **Summing Up:**
- > How easily can opinions be changed?
 - What might result in a change?
 - > What about attitudes? How easily can they be changed?
 - What would accomplish it?
 - > And values?
 - > Beliefs?

VI. Public Opinion

Instructions: Coach presents material

15 minutes

- ▶ Now let's take a look at a couple of ideas about what happens as individual opinions coalesce into public opinion. This is a real case of "on the one hand . . . and on the other hand . . ."

VISUAL #3 Public Opinion Process / Lang and Lang

- ▶ A classic early model comes from the work of sociologists Lang and Lang, in "Collective Dynamics." If you have been reading about "agenda setting" and "framing" in your texts, you may have seen the names.

- ▶ As an illustration of how things change, let's consider second-hand smoke. Tobacco smoke. In public places. Lang and Lang observe that in any given situation there is an “**existing mass sentiment**” – a general social consensus. In time, an **issue** arises, about which people have differing views. Let's say, smoking in restaurants. The result is formation of a **public**, people concerned pro and con with the issue, which leads to public and private **debate**. We have seen that, in recent years. The debate proceeds with all the devices you know about – publicity, staged events, polls, appeals – over a period of **time** – long enough for people to make up their minds. Now we can see a new **public opinion** which leads to **social action** – in this instance, attempts at regulation, such as non-smoking areas or outright ban of smoking in public places. In other cases, it might be an election, a consent decree, or taking a product off the market. We have seen the emergence of a new **social value** which becomes part of mass sentiment. The elapsed time is significant. Here is the process, for your notebooks. *Give class handout #6.*

- ▶ **Continue:** When you study the Diffusion process, regarding the adoption or rejection of new ideas, you will again see the impact of elapsed time on the process.

On the other hand, the concept of the “Tipping Point” points out that change can come as swiftly as an epidemic. The term itself is medical. It is the name given to that moment when a virus or a disease reaches “critical mass” – it becomes an epidemic. The same moment can come in the spread of an idea, according to author Malcolm Gladwell. It can be negative or positive, he notes. Ideas can be contagious. He cites an epidemic of teen-age suicide in the South Pacific, and a sudden drop in the murder rate in New York City.

He says, “Wow! What if everything has a Tipping Point? Wouldn't it be cool to try and look for Tipping Points in business, or in social policy, or in advertising or in any number of other non-medical areas?” He mentions a couple of such campaigns.

Here is a brief handout (#7) on the concept. It includes the author's Web site where you can read his original article in *The New Yorker*, which preceded his book.

- ▶ **Summing up:** Try to become well acquainted with these various approaches to what happens in people's heads – and don't set up a battle among them. Look for similarities or congruence, which may be significant. For instance, both “Tipping Point” and diffusion emphasize the importance of word of mouth. Lang and Lang mention “private debate.” Perhaps that's another term for word of mouth. Observe carefully, and think a situation through. You may find reflections of more than one theory, possibly interacting, and very likely giving you clues as to how you can work more effectively in your practice of public relations.

VII. Follow-Up Assignment: Mental Calisthenics

Here are a couple of mental exercises to help you get your brain in shape for the APR examination. They cover things you probably know how to do, but may not apply outside your own field very often. Please do #1 during the next week; #2 during the following week. Hand out Calisthenics #1, Audiences and Calisthenics #2, End Results

Elapsed Time: 1:45

NOTE TO COACH: If you wish to round out this session to two hours, consider including one or more of the short exercises available. “Propaganda” is appropriate here; reports on pioneers or the historical timeline are good at this stage in the sequence; “What constitutes a profession” or “Relationship to Management” are good at any time.

References

- 1 *Consumer Reports*, October 1996. Vol. 61, No. 10. Consumers Union, 101 Truman Ave., Yonkers NY 10703-1057.

Links for Session 2

Handouts

Public Relations:An Overview
(PRSA Foundation Monograph)

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| #2d | The Publics of Public Relations | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO2d.pdf |
| #6 | Public Opinion Process:
Lang and Lang | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO6.pdf |
| #7 | “The Tipping Point ” | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO7.pdf |
| #4 | Calisthenics #1 –Audiences | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO4.pdf |
| #5 | Calisthenics #2 – End Result | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO5.pdf |

Visual Aids

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| #1 | House Rules (if desired) | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachVis1.pdf |
| #3 | Public Opinion Process:
Lang and Lang | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachVis3.pdf |