SUPPOSE YOU'RE TRYING TO COMMUNICATE WITH SOMEONE WHO'S JUST LEARNING YOUR NATIVE LANGUAGE.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO TO INCREASE THE PROBABILITY THAT THEY'LL UNDERSTAND YOU?

gradcommx PRESENTS
ADJUSTING YOUR MESSAGE FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

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In terms of content, what would you say?

- No dice
- Didn't work out
  - Wasn't successful
  - I was very lucky
  - Over my dead body
  - I'm against it
  - I wasn't born yesterday
  - I'm not naive

You might avoid slang and use simple grammar.

In terms of delivery, how would you say it?
YOU MIGHT PAUSE SLOW PAUSE DOWN

USE GESTURES.

OR...

WRITE IT DOWN!
WHAT IF IT'S AN ELDERLY PERSON?

BFF = BEST FRIENDS FOREVER

Bogo = Buy One Get One

LMGTFY = Let Me Google That For You...

YOU MIGHT ADJUST FOR THINGS THEIR GENERATION ISN'T AWARE OF.

YOU MIGHT REPEAT THINGS AND SPEAK LOUDER. AND, IF YOU'RE COMMUNICATING WITH TEXT YOU MIGHT USE A BIGGER FONT SIZE.

I KNOW THAT LAST ONE—SONNY.
LAST EXAMPLE: WHAT IF IT'S A TODDLER?

WELL, THERE YOU WOULD USE SIMPLE WORDS.

INSTEAD OF SAYING "SWELTERING"

YOU MIGHT SAY -

SWELTERING → HOT!
SCALDING → HOT HOT OUCHIE!

AND, AGAIN, YOU'D SLOW DOWN, REPEAT, AND PROBABLY USE A GENTLE, HIGHER-PITCHED, VOICE.
These are things that most of us already know how to do.

You adjust both what you say and how you say it to your audience.

Instead of just accounting for language, ability, and age, you want to also consider technical background.

Because you will talk to people who have a less technical background than you.

So what do you do?
YOUR CHILD PRESENTS WITH ACQUIRED ACCOMMODATIVE ESOTROPIA AND POSSIBLE AMBYLOPIA OF THE RIGHT EYE RELATED TO STRABISMUS.

WE ARE GOING TO FOCUS ON CONTENT. IN PARTICULAR, WHAT MIGHT INTERFERE WITH YOUR AUDIENCE’S UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR MESSAGE?

JARGON.
Jargon can describe something concisely & precisely, and is convenient to use with your technical peers, but otherwise, it is an unnecessary and unwieldy hurdle for those who are new to your field and unfamiliar with its terms.

And if we look back at the some of the examples mentioned earlier in the comic, that's really the problem isn't it? Terms that mean nothing to your audience.

With the elderly, you avoid pop culture references.

With the toddler, you avoid words they haven't yet acquired.

In the end, what you are trying to do is minimize unfamiliar technical jargon and, instead, use words that your audience understands.
SO, WHAT DO YOU DO?

WELL, FIRST, ASK YOURSELF IF THE AUDIENCE NEEDS TO KNOW A PARTICULAR TERM OR DETAIL.

YOUR CHILD’S EYES ARE POORLY ALIGNED, BUT BECAUSE THEY ARE TRYING TO FOCUS TO SEE CLEARLY, THE RIGHT EYE IS CROSSING INWARDS AS A RESULT. IT MAY EVEN BE THAT HER BRAIN FAVORS THE LEFT EYE OVER THE RIGHT.

AND, IF NOT, OMIT IT AND JUST SAY IT IN PLAIN, SIMPLE TERMS.
YOUR CHILD HAS STRABISMUS IN WHICH THE EYES ARE MISALIGNED. IN THIS CASE, INWARDS...

SOMETHING IS BOOLEAN IF IT ONLY HAS TWO VALUES, FOR EXAMPLE: TRUE OR FALSE, OR 0 AND 1. BOOLEAN CAN BE STORED IN YOUR COMPUTER WITH A SINGLE BIT OF MEMORY.

IF YOU WANT THEM TO KNOW A TERM—(E.G., IT'S A VERY BASIC TERM THAT WILL KEEP COMING UP AND IS HANDY TO ESTABLISH AND ADD TO THEIR VOCABULARY),

THEN YOU MIGHT DEFINE IT, OR—

YOU COULD RENAME IT SOMETHING THAT'S LESS INTIMIDATING AND/OR SOMETHING THE AUDIENCE CAN RELATE TO.

CALL IT "SPookY ACTION AT A DISTANCE" IF YOU WILL...

AS A SIDE NOTE—

WHEN POSSIBLE USE A NAME THAT DESCRIBES WHAT IS BEING DONE INSTEAD OF HOW IT'S BEING DONE.

SO LET'S REFER TO THESE PROBLEMS AS BEING "EASY TO CALCULATE", BUT THESE OTHER ONES AS "EASIER TO CHECK THAN TO CALCULATE."

WHEN YOU USE WORDS YOUR AUDIENCE IS FAMILIAR WITH, THAT MEANS ANY JARGON FROM THEIR TECHNICAL FIELD IS FAIR GAME FOR YOU TO USE.

(EVEN IF THEIR FIELD IS DIFFERENT FROM YOURS)

A GEL AND A MASS SPECTROMETER CAN BASICALLY SORT MOLECULES—BY SIZE AND BY MASS RESPECTIVELY.
NOW, YOU MIGHT ASK ME TWO QUESTIONS:

ONE: HOW DO I KNOW WHAT MY AUDIENCE'S BACKGROUND IS?

TWO: IF I OMIT DETAILS... ISN'T MY DESCRIPTION GOING TO BE LESS ACCURATE AND LESS PRECISE?

HOW DO WE KNOW?

WELL...

YOU ASK.
Ask them what their background is at the start, or ask them if they understand during your conversation.

Two - you watch.

You watch their facial expression, you look for nonverbal cues.

Things like:

HMM

OHH

I SEE!

And, three, you listen to the questions they ask but you also listen to verbal acknowledgments that they make during the conversation.
So when you ask, watch, and listen, you can figure out whether or not they understand, and you can adjust your explanation as you go along.

What about the second question? By removing jargon and details are you making things less accurate and more general?

Yes, that's probably true.
But the goal here is to first get the gist of your idea across without overwhelming your audience.

Then, through subsequent interaction and questioning fill in those missing details as time and interest permit.

So, in summary:
You're probably used to the idea of adjusting to your audience by now. Why not account for technical background?

Simple Verbiage

Leave Technical Term Out

Define Technical Term

Rename Technical Term

Describe what, not "how"

Etc.

You can remove one of the barriers to understanding technical content by either removing jargon or replacing jargon with terms that are more familiar.
CHANGING THE WAY YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CONTENT TO FIT WHO YOU'RE SPEAKING TO - ALLOWS YOUR MESSAGE TO BECOME MORE ACCESSIBLE -

TO YOUR AUDIENCE.