

# Purpose and Audience

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the importance of determining the purpose and audience of texts. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

### 1. Purpose in Writing

#### 1a. Connection to Mode

### 2. Audience in Writing

### 3. Relationship between Purpose and Audience

## 1. Purpose in Writing

Before you write, you need to know the **purpose**, which is the intended goal or value of a text. In short, why are you writing what you're writing? This purpose will govern just about all of the tools you use, including:

- Mode
- Tone
- Level of formality
- Structure

To find out what the purpose is, ask yourself what the goal of your text is, and what you hope it will achieve. Different purposes will create different kinds of writing, and there are many kinds of purposes— entertainment and information, argument or discussion.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Stories are often designed to make people laugh, so their purpose is entertainment. Instruction manuals are meant to inform and guide, while advertisements are meant to convince you to buy.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Purpose

The intended goal or value of a text.

## 1a. Connection to Mode

Different purposes will change the **mode**, or type of writing, the author will choose.

There are several different modes of writing:

- **Narrative mode**, which is driven by a story
- **Descriptive mode**, which provides details about a specific subject
- **Informative mode**, which provides unbiased facts or instructions
- **Argumentative mode**, which takes a position on one side of an issue

Each mode can be particularly useful for different purposes.

### IN CONTEXT

The argumentative mode, for instance, could be used when your purpose is to justify a recent purchase to your friend, to entice your family to join you on a trip, or to debate the policies of a political candidate. However, if your purpose is to explain the candidate's policies to your friend, who's unfamiliar with that politician, the argumentative mode wouldn't fit. You're not trying to convince your friend to vote for that candidate; you're just trying to tell her about the candidate's platform. Thus, you would want to use the informative mode.

What if you wanted to tell your friend a story about a time when you met this politician? You would use the narrative mode to help your friend understand the sequence of events in your story. It's likely that you would also use the descriptive mode while telling a story in the narrative mode, since description is used to add in sensory details like sights and smells that draw a clear and vivid picture.

In an academic setting, you may be assigned a particular mode to use, such as when you take an argumentative, or persuasive, writing class. If you're assigned an argumentative paper, your purpose will need to be argumentation. If you take a beginning composition class, you may be asked to write about yourself. Your mode may be narrative in this situation.



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Mode

The manner in which a text is written.

#### Narrative Mode

A mode of writing that is driven by a story.

#### Descriptive Mode

A mode of writing that focuses on details about a specific person, place, or thing.

#### Informative Mode

A mode of writing designed to inform, describe, or explain.

### Argumentative Mode

A mode of writing that takes a clear position on a debatable question, and backs up claims with evidence and reasoning.

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## 2. Audience in Writing

In general, the **audience** of a piece of writing is the reader of a text, which can be intended (targeted by the author), or unintended (not targeted by the author).

In a writing class, your intended audience is your instructor, who you know is going to read your paper. Furthermore, you can probably assume that your instructor is an informed audience— a factor that will also influence the way you write.

However, if you find out you'll be sharing your paper with peers, you will have a new, additional audience— one that you hadn't intended in the first place. Therefore, it's always important to keep in mind not only your intended audience, but potential unintended audiences as well.

When writing, you might consider your audience's:

- Age
- Gender
- Interests
- Moral or religious beliefs
- Political views
- Level of education or expertise

A skillful writer will navigate these audience traits carefully. Thus, as you assess your audience, ask yourself:

- What does my audience already know?
- How interested will my audience be in this detail?
- Am I describing details in a way that will make sense to my audience?
- What characteristics do I think my audience will have?
- Given my audience, how can I write the most effective text possible?



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Audience

The intentional or unintentional reader(s) of a text.

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## 3. Relationship between Purpose and Audience

From what you just learned, you have probably already begun to consider the close relationship between a text's purpose and its audience.

You can think of this relationship like a cycle. The purpose is your reason for writing the text, but you hope to achieve that purpose with a specific audience. Thus, speaking directly to that audience is part of your purpose. These things are naturally linked.

Because of this, the audience is not something you can consider after you've already written the text. You have to write with a particular audience in mind, and target your words to them.

### IN CONTEXT

If your purpose is to write a guidebook of historical sites for visitors to your hometown, those visitors themselves are part of your purpose. You would write for visitors differently than you would for locals, and you'd use a different approach if you were writing for an audience who has expertise in historical sites. In that case, you'd maybe choose a more descriptive mode, and definitely a more precise vocabulary.

However, if you were writing a proposal to local school children to try to convince them to visit these sites, that younger audience would change the approach you would take to this purpose. You would obviously need a simpler vocabulary, but you might also use different sentence structures and even a different tone. For instance, children might not be convinced by a serious tone. You might need to choose a more excited, lighthearted one.



### BIG IDEA

Different approaches will work better with different audiences, and you therefore want to think carefully about both your intended audience and purpose as you write



### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **in writing, purpose** is the intended goal or value of a text. Purpose has a strong **connection to mode**, or the way the text is written. There are several different modes, and the one you select should be the one that best serves your purpose.

You also learned that **in writing, audience** is the reader of a text. Audience can be either intended or unintended, and the effectiveness of a text will depend on how well you reach your audience. The **relationship between purpose and audience** is essential to consider, as each will influence the way a text is written.

Best of luck in your learning!

**Argumentative Mode**

A mode of writing that takes a clear position on a debatable question, and backs up claims with evidence and reasoning.

**Audience**

The intentional or unintentional reader(s) of a text.

**Descriptive Mode**

A mode of writing that focuses on details about a specific person, place, or thing.

**Informative Mode**

A mode of writing designed to inform, describe, or explain.

**Mode**

The manner in which a text is written.

**Narrative Mode**

A mode of writing that is driven by a story.

**Purpose**

The intended goal or value of a text.

**Tone**

A writer's attitude toward a subject, as demonstrated through a piece of writing.