

# Purpose and Audience in Composition

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the importance of discerning 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. 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

All of these purposes will change the **mode** the author will choose. These purposes are also more specific than the mode itself, but they can be served by that particular mode's structure, tone, and other features.

Remember, there are several different modes of writing:

- Narrative
- Descriptive
- Informative
- Argumentative

Each mode can be particularly useful for different purposes.

#### IN CONTEXT

The argumentative mode, for instance, could be deployed 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 was to describe 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.

In an academic setting, you may be assigned a particular mode to use, such as when you take an argumentative writing class. If you're assigned an argumentative paper, your purpose will need to be argumentation.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Mode

The manner in which a text is written.

## 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 philosophy
- Political ideology
- 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.

## 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 inherently linked.

Because of this, the audience is not something you can consider after you've already written. 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 somber 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!

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#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Audience**

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

##### **Mode**

The manner in which a text is written.

##### **Purpose**

The intended goal or value of a text.