

# Purpose and Audience in Writing

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the importance of discerning the purpose and audience of texts. You will also explore how having a clearly defined purpose and audience strengthens your communication skill. 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. All well-written communications must have a strong purpose in mind in order to clearly articulate their intent. If a person has strong **communication skills**, their purpose will come across clearly to the audience.



## 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
- Persuasive

Each mode can be particularly useful for different purposes.

#### IN CONTEXT

The persuasive mode, for instance, could be deployed when your purpose is to convince your colleagues that a particular team-building activity would be beneficial to implement at your company.

However, if your purpose was to describe a group team-building activity to colleagues who are unfamiliar with it, the persuasive mode wouldn't fit. You're not trying to convince your colleagues to utilize your idea; you're just trying to tell them about the details of the activity. 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 a persuasive writing class. If you're assigned a persuasive paper, your purpose will need to be persuasion.



#### 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?



#### Communication: Apply Your Skill

Consider your ideal career and the communications you will have with others in this career. Will you primarily communicate with coworkers, clients, other organizations, or a mix of all three? How can you learn more about your audience to ensure that your communications are written in a manner that's helpful to them?



#### 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.



#### THINK ABOUT IT

As we discussed earlier, narrative writing and descriptive writing can appeal to people's emotions.

How does the intended audience affect the way the author uses narrative?



In narrative writing, people will usually be more interested in a character they can relate to. If you are writing a training manual for a group of workers, telling stories from the perspective of managers will not be as effective as writing from the perspective of a new hire.

How does the intended audience affect the way the author uses description?



Descriptive writing can be ineffective if the descriptions are unfamiliar to the reader, such as writing detailed descriptions of natural settings for city dwellers. This can alienate the reader, or at least bore them! Knowing your audience can help you tailor these descriptions to be most effective.

#### IN CONTEXT

If your purpose is to write a training handbook for new employees at your workplace, those employees themselves are part of your purpose. You would write for new employees differently than you would for people who have worked at the company for a long time and have expertise in the systems and procedures used there. In the latter case, you'd maybe choose more technical vocabulary with less description and explanation.



#### 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. Finally, you explored how audience and purpose enable you to be a strong communicator.

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.