

INSTRUCTOR: "Topic, Audience, and Purpose."

Writers guide readers through ideas like tour guides lead groups through a city. To lead a good tour, the guide needs to know the location, who is participating, and what the tour needs to accomplish. Giving a walking tour to American school children who are studying history in Paris would be very different from training a group of volunteers to help with crowds during the Bastille Day parade.

Similarly, effective writers need to understand their writing situation, which includes their topic, audience, and purpose. To guide readers through their ideas, writers need to know what they are writing about, who their readers are, and why they are writing.

Deciding what to write about is a challenge, even when the assignment includes a topic. For example, if the assignment requires that you write about a social issue, you'll need to brainstorm a few and explore even more specific aspects. You'll know you found a good topic when it matches the assignment's goals, interests you, leads you to quality sources, and can be fully discussed within the word and page limits.

How you approach your topic is related to your audience. In your career, being able to adjust your writing for different audiences, new clients, colleagues, your boss is an important skill. You'll also need to be able to adjust for the different audiences in your personal life, too.

Practicing this skill in college requires imagining that the audience is more than just your instructor and your peers. You might be asked to write as if you were submitting an article to a magazine or a journal, or you might be asked to write as if you were on the job. Whether the audience is in your professional, personal, or academic circle, you'll want to make sure that you consider how much they know, what they care about, and what they expect of you and your ideas.

What you say about your topic to a specific audience largely depends upon your

purpose. Purpose is why you are writing. Although there are many purposes for writing, most purposes relate to three main categories-- informing, persuading, or entertaining.

When you write to inform, you are telling readers what, how, and why something happened as it did. Observations, summaries, and reports are informative.

When you write to persuade, you are trying to get readers to change their minds or their behavior. Advertisements, calls to action, and arguments are persuasive.

When you write to entertain, you are trying to connect with readers' emotions. Stories, personal essays, and movies are entertaining.

Most writing includes more than one purpose, but it's helpful to keep your main goal in mind because it will help you decide what types of information you need to include more or less of. Remember, like a good tour guide, effective writers take time to understand their writing situation. Before you begin to write, carefully consider your topic, audience, and purpose, so you can clearly guide readers through your ideas.