Audience

Writers write for readers. Understanding your audience's needs, wants, and expectations, can improve the reception and effectiveness of your writing. Having a specific audience in mind will help you use an appropriate tone and include the material that will help you accomplish your purpose. This handout offers basic writing principles, but always tailor your work to your audience and assignment.

Consider Your Audience

The following questions might help you consider your audience and think about how you can meet their needs.

Identify an Audience

- Who are you writing to? Who will read your work? Who do you want to take action? (This information may be in the prompt or assignment details. It might be more than one audience.)
  Example: If you are writing a scientific article, you are likely not writing to all scientists, only a specific subset in a select field who are interested in your topic.
- What do they value? What could motivate them to act? How do they feel about the topic?
  Example: If your audience disagrees with you on a topic, you have to work harder to be persuasive.

Decide What to Include

- What do they already know about the topic?
  Example: An audience familiar with your topic may not need an in-depth explain of every concept.
- What do you want them to learn? What new information can you give them?
  Example: An audience unfamiliar with your topic may need more developed and detailed explanations.
- What do you want them to think after reading your work? What action do you want them to take?
  Example: When writing to a potential employer, you may want them to contact you for an interview.

Use an Appropriate Tone

- What do they expect from your tone and vocabulary? Should your writing be formal or informal?
  Example: You would use terminology in a scientific field that you would not use elsewhere.
- What is your relationship to them?
  Example: You would write differently to a peer than you would to an authority figure.
- What impression of yourself do you want to give in your writing?
  Example: If you use slang in a resume, your potential employer might think you are unprofessional. If you use technical jargon in a more casual assignment, readers might think you are showing off.

Additional Tips

- Balance tailoring your work to an audience with providing the expected structures and conventions of the genre or type of writing you are producing.

- When addressing multiple audiences, make sure your writing appeals to all of them. Avoid language or ideas that might offend or alienate members of your audience or cause them to disregard your work.

- Try to anticipate and address counterarguments your audience might make.

- Be aware of less obvious or secondary audiences. For example, while you may be writing for a professor, it is wise to think of that professor as part of a larger academic, discipline-specific audience.