



THE WRITING PROCESS

Knowing Your Audience

Except for journal or diary entries, most writing is meant to be read by an audience, and so writers must learn to consider their audience as they compose. Anticipating your reader's needs, attitudes and beliefs will help you decide questions both of form and content. The words you choose, the method you choose to explain a point, the sequence of your argument are all influenced by assumptions you make about who you are speaking to. This is not to say that you must change your opinion or point of view to please your audience, but you must help your reader to understand your writing, whether or not s/he will finally agree with it.

For most academic writing, your immediate audience is your teacher, usually an expert on the subject you are writing about. But instead of assuming that your teacher already knows everything you have to say, it is usually a better strategy to assume that the teacher is an interested reader who knows as much as most educated people know about your subject, i.e., the instructor has what is considered "common knowledge" of the subject. You should then design your writing so that such a reader can understand your ideas.

The following questions should help you to imagine or identify your audience more clearly.

- How old is the audience?
- What is the social or economic condition of the audience?
- What general philosophies of politics or government does the audience hold?
- What values and beliefs would be common to an audience of this age?
- What economic, social, and moral values is the audience likely to hold?
- What value does the audience place on education, religion, and work?
- Which of these values—economic, social, political, educational—is most important to the audience? Least important?
- How does the audience feel about its past? its present? its future?
- Does the audience expect certain patterns of thought in what it reads? Should you include a lot of data to convince the audience? What authorities will be most convincing?
- What terms do you need to define? Will stories and analogies be effective or confusing?
- What issues make the audience angry or defensive?
- What are the options you have for presenting unpopular opinions?
- What is the most convincing appeal you can make? Should you appeal to logic or reason? To the audience's emotions? Should you try to convince the audience of your honesty and trustworthiness?
- Are you saying what you believe or what you believe the audience wants to hear?