

CHAPTER 1

Thinking About Purposes, Audiences, and Technologies

1a How is “writing” defined?

Writing communicates a message for a purpose to readers. The four key terms in the prior sentence are important. **Written communication** involves sending a message to a destination. The **message** of writing is its content. The **purpose** (1b) of each writing task strongly influences decisions writers make as they put their ideas into words. **Readers**, usually referred to as the **audience** (1c), are the destination that a writer wishes to reach.

1b What are the major purposes for writing?

A writer’s **purpose** for writing motivates what and how he or she writes. Some students think their purpose is to fulfill an assignment, but that’s only the beginning. The concept of purpose relates to the reason that you’re writing. All writers, whether student or professional, need to get under way by choosing which of the four major purposes of writing, listed in Box 1-1, they want to pursue.

In this handbook, we concentrate on the two major purposes you need for most **academic writing**, the writing you do for college and other scholarly endeavors: to inform a reader and to persuade a reader. We’ve chosen these two because they’re the most practical and helpful for students. The two remaining purposes listed in Box 1-1 are important for contributing to human thought and culture, but they relate less to what most college writing involves.

BOX 1-1 SUMMARY



Purposes for writing*

- To express yourself
- To inform a reader
- To persuade a reader
- To create a literary work

*Adapted from James L. Kinneavy, *A Theory of Discourse* (1971; New York: Norton, 1980).

1b.1 What is expressive writing?

Expressive writing is writing to express your personal thoughts and feelings. Much expressive writing is for the writer's eyes only, such as that in diaries, personal journals, or exploratory drafts. When expressive writing is for public reading, it usually falls into the category of literary writing. The excerpt here comes from a memoir intended for public reading.

The smells in Brooklyn: coffee, fingernail polish, eucalyptus, the breath from laundry rooms, pot roast, Tater Tots. A woman I know who grew up here says she moved away because she could not stand the smell of cooking food in the hallway of her parents' building. I feel just the opposite. I used to live in a converted factory above an army-navy store, and I like being in a place that smells like people live there.

—Ian Frazier, “Taking the F”

1b.2 What is informative writing?

Informative writing seeks to give information to readers and usually to explain it. Another name for this type of writing is *expository writing* because it expounds on—sets forth in detail—observations, ideas, facts, scientific data, and statistics. You can find informative writing in textbooks, encyclopedias, technical and business reports, nonfiction books, newspapers, and many magazines.

The essential goal of informative academic writing is to educate your readers about something. Like all good educators, therefore, you want to present your information clearly, accurately, completely, and fairly. Box 1-2 gives you a checklist to assess your informative writing.

BOX 1-2 CHECKLIST



Informative writing

- Is its information clear?
- Does it present facts, ideas, and observations that can be verified?
- Does its information seem complete and accurate?
- Is the writer's tone reasonable and free of distortions? (1c.4)

1b.3 What is persuasive writing?

Persuasive writing, also called *argument writing*, seeks to convince readers about a matter of opinion. When you write to persuade, you deal with debatable topics, those that people can consider from more than one point of view.

Your goal is to change your readers’ minds about the topic—or at least to bring your readers’ opinions closer to your point of view. To succeed, you want to evoke a reaction in your audience so that they think beyond their present position (for example, reasoning why free speech needs to be preserved) or take action (for example, register to vote). Examples of persuasive writing include newspaper editorials, letters to the editor, opinion essays in newspapers and magazines, reviews, sermons, books that argue a point of view, and business proposals that advocate certain approaches over others.

In general terms, persuasive writing means you need to move beyond merely stating your opinion. You need to give the basis for that opinion. You support your opinion by using specific, illustrative details to back up your **generalizations**, which are usually very broad statements.

Box 1-3 gives you a checklist to assess your persuasive writing.

BOX 1-3 CHECKLIST

Persuasive writing

- Does it present a point of view about which opinions vary?
- Does it support its point of view with specifics?
- Does it base its point of view on sound reasoning and logic?
- Are the parts of its argument clear?
- Does it intend to evoke a reaction from the reader?

EXERCISE 1-1 Using each topic listed here, work individually or with your peer-response group to think through two different essays: one informative, the second persuasive. Be ready to discuss in detail how the two essays would differ. For help, consult section 1b.

1. Fast food
2. Tastes in music
3. Required college courses
4. Road rage
5. Storms

1c What does “audience” mean for writing?

Your **audience** consists of everyone who will read your writing. After college, your audiences will be readers of your business, professional, and public writing (Chapter 38). In college, you address a mix of audience types, each of which

expects to read ACADEMIC WRITING^{*}. Here's a list of categories of audiences for academic writing, each of which is detailed in the section listed in parentheses.

- Your peers (1c.1)
- A general audience (1c.2)
- A specialist audience (1c.3)

The more specifics you can assume about your audience for your academic writing, the better your chances of reaching it successfully. The questions in Box 1-4 can serve as a guide.

When you know or can reasonably assume who will be in your reading audience for each assignment, your chances of reaching it improve. For example, if you're writing a sales report for your supervisor, you can use terms such as *product life cycle*, *break-even quantity*, *competition*, and *markup*. In contrast, if general readers were the audience for the same information, you would want to avoid specialized, technical vocabulary—or if you had to use some essential specialized terms, you would define them in a nontechnical way.

BOX 1-4 SUMMARY


Characteristics of reading audiences

What Setting Are They Reading In?

- Academic setting?
- Workplace setting?
- Public setting?



Who Are They?

- Age, gender
- Ethnic backgrounds, political philosophies, religious beliefs
- Roles (student, parent, voter, wage earner, property owner, veteran, and others)
- Interests, hobbies

What Do They Know?

- Level of education
- Amount of general or specialized knowledge about the topic
- Probable preconceptions and prejudices brought to the topic

^{*}Note: Terms in SMALL CAPITAL LETTERS have been defined elsewhere in the text. To find a definition, look up the term in the book's index and turn to the page number indicated in **bold type**.

 **ESL NOTE:** As someone from a non-US culture, you might be surprised—even offended—by the directness with which people speak and write in the United States. If so, we hope you’ll read our open letter on page 494 to multilingual students about honoring their cultures. 

1c.1 What is a peer audience?

Your *peers* are other writers like you. In some writing classes, instructors divide students into **peer-response groups**. Participating in a peer-response group makes you part of a respected tradition of colleagues helping colleagues.

The role of members of a peer-response group is to react and discuss, not to do the work for someone. Hearing or reading comments from your peers might be your first experience with seeing how others read your writing. This can be very informative, surprising, and helpful. Also, when peers share their writing with the group, each member gets the added advantage of learning about other students’ writing for the same assignment.

If your instructor gives you guidelines for working in a peer-response group, follow them carefully. If you’ve never before participated in a peer-response group, or in the particular kind of group that your instructor forms, here are ways to get started: Consult the guidelines in Box 1-5 below; watch what experienced peers do; and ask questions of your instructor (your interest shows a positive, cooperative attitude). Otherwise, just dive in knowing that you will learn as you go.

BOX 1-5 SUMMARY



Guidelines for participating in peer-response groups

One major principle needs to guide your participation in a peer-response group: Always take an upbeat, constructive attitude, whether you’re responding to someone else’s writing or receiving responses from others.

As a Responder

- Think of yourself in the role of a coach, not a judge.
- Consider all writing by your peers as “works in progress.”
- After hearing or reading a peer’s writing, briefly summarize it to check that you and your peer are clear about what the peer said or meant to say.
- Start with what you think is well done. No one likes to hear only negative comments.
- Be honest in your suggestions for improvements.



Guidelines for participating in peer-response groups (*continued*)

- Base your responses on an understanding of the writing process, and remember that you're reading drafts, not finished products. All writing can be revised.
- Give concrete and specific responses. General comments such as "This is good" or "This is weak" aren't much help. Say specifically what is good or weak.
- Follow your instructor's system for putting your comments in writing so that your fellow writer can recall what you said. If one member of your group is supposed to take notes, speak clearly so that the person can be accurate. If you're the note taker, be accurate, and ask the speaker to repeat what he or she said if it went by too quickly.

As a Writer

- Adopt an attitude that encourages your peers to respond freely. Listen and try to resist any urge to interrupt during a comment or to jump in to react.
- Remain open-minded. Your peers' comments can help you see your writing in a fresh way, which, in turn, can help you produce a better-revised draft.
- Ask for clarification if a comment isn't clear. If a comment is too general, ask for specifics.
- As much as you encourage your peers to be honest, remember that the writing is yours. You "own" it, and you decide which comments to use or not use.

1c.2 What is a general audience?

A **general audience** of readers is composed of educated, experienced readers. These are people who regularly read newspapers, magazines, and books. These readers, with general knowledge of many subjects, likely know something about your topic. However, if you get too technical, you're writing for readers who possess specialized knowledge on a particular subject (1c.3). Consequently, avoid specialized or technical terms, although you can use a few as long as you include everyday definitions.

1c.3 What is a specialist audience?

A **specialist audience** is composed of readers who have expert knowledge of specific subjects or who are particularly committed to those subjects. Many people are experts in their occupational fields, and some become experts in

areas that simply interest them, such as astronomy or raising orchids. People from a particular group background (for example, Democrats, Republicans, Catholics, or military veterans) are knowledgeable in those areas.

Specialist readers, however, share more than knowledge: They share assumptions and beliefs. Additionally, whenever you introduce a concept that’s likely to be new to a specialist audience, explain the new concept thoroughly rather than assume that they’ll understand it right away.

1c.4 What is “tone” in writing?

Tone is more than what you say; tone is *how* you say it. As a writer, your tone reveals your attitude toward your AUDIENCE as well as the topic. Tone in writing operates like tone of voice, except in writing you can’t rely on facial expressions and voice intonations to communicate your message. (See Box 1-6.)

Your DICTION (choice of words), LEVEL OF FORMALITY, and writing style create your tone. While you can use SLANG and other highly INFORMAL LANGUAGE in a note to your roommate or a close friend, such a relaxed tone isn’t appropriate for ACADEMIC WRITING or BUSINESS WRITING. As a rule, when you write for an audience about which you know little, use more formality in your tone. “More formality,” by the way, doesn’t mean dull and drab. Indeed, lively language in a serious discussion enhances your message.

BOX 1-6 SUMMARY



How to use tone in writing

- Reserve a highly informal tone for conversational writing.
- Use a formal or medium level of formality in your academic writing and when you write for supervisors, professionals, and other people you know from a distance.
- Avoid an overly formal, ceremonial tone.
- Avoid sarcasm and other forms of nastiness.
- Choose language appropriate for your topic and your readers.
- Choose words that work with your message, not against it.
- Whatever tone you choose to use, be consistent in each document.

EXERCISE 1-2 Using the topics listed on the following page, work individually or with your peer-response group to think through specific ways the tone of an essay would differ for the following three audiences: a college instructor, a close friend, and a supervisor at a job. Be ready to discuss in some detail how the three essays on each topic would differ for each audience. For help, consult sections 1c and 1d.

1. Suggestions for a fair way to evaluate each person's work
2. Benefits of having a more casual dress code
3. An explanation of why you were absent from class yesterday

1d What does “sources for writing” mean?

Sources for writing consist of material that contains someone else's ideas, not yours. Sources, often called *outside sources*, include credible information on the Internet, library collections, and the spoken words of experts. Sources can add authority to what you write, especially if the topic is open to debate.

Some students wonder whether consulting sources for their writing might suggest that they can't come up with ideas of their own. Actually, the opposite is true. When students use sources well, they demonstrate their ability to locate relevant sources, assess whether the sources are credible and worth using, integrate the material with skill, and credit the sources accurately. To achieve this, follow the guidelines in Box 1-7.

Of course, no matter how many outside sources you refer to, you remain your own first source. Throughout your life, you've been building a fund of knowledge by reading, going to school, attending cultural and sports events, hearing speeches, watching television, and exploring the Internet. The basis for your writing is the information you have, as well as your ideas, reflections, reactions, and opinions. Sources offer support and additional information and points of view, but you're always the starting point for your writing.

When you use sources in your writing, never plagiarize. As a student, you want to become a full participant in the community of knowledge seekers

BOX 1-7 SUMMARY





Guidelines for using sources in writing

- Evaluate sources critically. Not all are accurate, true, or honest.
- Represent your sources accurately. Be sure to quote, PARAPHRASE, and summarize well so that you avoid distorting the material (Chapter 32).
- Never plagiarize (Chapter 32).
- Know the difference between writing a SUMMARY and writing a SYNTHESIS. A summary means all you do is report the source material. That is not enough. A synthesis means you make intelligent connections between the source and your ideas, or among a variety of sources, or between a variety of sources and your ideas. Synthesizing is what college writers are expected to do.
- Credit your sources with DOCUMENTATION that names them clearly and completely. Ask your instructor which DOCUMENTATION STYLE to use. Two widely used styles are presented in Chapters 31–34.

and makers. The expected honorable standard for participants is always to credit thinkers who have come before you and upon whose shoulders you stand as you learn and create. You therefore never want to behave unethically by stealing someone's thinking or language.

If you forget to document your sources, you're plagiarizing (Chapter 32). Using quotation marks without naming your source is a form of plagiarizing. Leaving out quotation marks from a direct quotation that you take from a source, even if you name the source, is a form of plagiarizing. PLAGIARISM is a major academic offense. A student who plagiarizes can instantly fail a course or be expelled from college.

New computer technologies make plagiarism especially easy to detect today. If ethical reasons aren't enough to prevent you from plagiarizing, then the real chance of strong punishment definitely should be.

 **ESL NOTE:** In many cultures other than those in the United States and Canada, original thinking and responses to reading aren't acceptable. Instead, instructors expect students to respect and copy the thoughts and exact language of scholars, without naming the people who wrote the scholarship. This practice is not acceptable in the United States and most British-based educational systems. You always need to use documentation to credit your source. Otherwise, you are plagiarizing—that is, “stealing” the ideas of others, which is a major offense. 

CHAPTER 2

Planning and Shaping

2a What is the writing process?

Many people think that professional writers can sit down at their computers, think of ideas, and magically produce a finished draft, word by perfect word. Experienced writers know better. They know that writing is a process, a series of activities that starts the moment they begin thinking about a subject and ends with proofreading the final draft. Experienced writers also know that good writing is rewriting, again and yet again. Their drafts are filled with additions, deletions, rewordings, and rearrangements.

For example, see below how Lynn revised the paragraph you just read. She didn't make all the changes at the same time, even though it looks that way