



## School of Liberal Arts

University Writing Center  
"Because writers need readers"  
Cavanaugh Hall 427      University Library 2125  
(317) 274-2049              (317) 278-8171  
<http://liberalarts.iupui.edu/uwc/>

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# Audience Analysis

*This handout reviews one of the most important elements a writer should consider during the composition process: the audience. In writing, it is essential to identify the audience in order to use appropriate strategies to reach that particular audience. Identifying and analyzing the audience allows the writer to address readers effectively.*

## Identify the Audience

The first step of audience analysis is to know your audience. The more specific your answers to the following questions are, the narrower your awareness of audience will be, and the better you can tailor your writing to suit the readers' needs. Consider the following questions:

- What is the primary age group of your audience?
- What is the gender of your audience?
- What is your audience's ethnicity and/or cultural background?
- Where is your audience located? What country/state/city?
- What is the education level, socio-economic status, and religion of your audience?
- What do your readers value? What are their interests?
- Are you addressing a specific group of people? For example, are you addressing students, teachers, coaches, parents, women, men?
- Can you further narrow the group you've selected? For example, rather than all coaches, should you focus on basketball coaches? Rather than all students, should you focus on students attending English classes at IUPUI?

## Recognize the Audience's Familiarity with the Topic

In order to effectively address your specific audience, you must maintain an awareness of readers' knowledge of your topic. Think about these questions:

- What does your audience know about the topic? How much background information will readers need in order to understand your topic?
- Do you need to explain jargon or define terms?
- Does your audience have a bias about the topic that you will need to address? For example, are you presenting the issue of students being able to carry guns on campus if they have a permit? If so, keep in mind the audience's probable biases.
- Could your audience have any other assumptions about the topic?

## Write with the Audience in Mind

After you have analyzed your audience's familiarity with your topic, think about achieving the purpose of your writing. Several things are important to keep in mind:

- Define unfamiliar terms, using jargon only if your intended audience would be familiar with it.
- Adapt the formality of your language to your audience. For example, don't use slang in a letter to the mayor. However, slang may or may not be appropriate in essays targeted towards college students.
- Use sources that your audience will find believable and credible. Wikipedia may not be a credible source when writing about medical illness. (Although there may be credible sources on the Wikipedia page.)
- Address your audience's bias, preconceived notions, or beliefs. If your audience is parents and your topic is the benefits of playing video games, you may need to address the fact that some parents believe that video games may be harmful to children.
- Keep in mind what will move your audience. Will they respond best to emotion, logic, credible or famous sources, or a combination of the three? For more information on this issue, see the University Writing Center's handout entitled "[The Rhetorical Triangle: Understanding and Using Logos, Ethos, and Pathos.](#)"

