

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE (PODCAST 1 TRANSCRIPT)

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Hi everyone this is Kurtis with another effective writing podcast. In this episode, I am going to talk about the importance of understanding your audience and purpose when writing.

For many, the act of writing is an arduous task akin to such formidable challenges as climbing a mountain or running a marathon. But even these enormous challenges are surmountable with proper preparation. The same is true for writing (and probably anything else in life for that matter). Just as a mountain climber would have a purpose for climbing a mountain and target a specific mountain to climb, a writer, too, needs a purpose for writing and a specific audience to target.

Some people have difficulty expressing their ideas in writing, not so much because they lack the necessary skills, but, rather, because they do not consider carefully enough what they hope to accomplish in a piece of writing (this is the purpose) and who they are trying to reach (this is the audience).

Keep in mind that the fundamental purpose of any form of writing—be it an advertisement, an email, a recipe, or an essay—is to communicate meaning to an audience, so you always have to think about why you are writing and to whom.

Effective writing shows an awareness of audience and purpose. When you write, ask these questions:

- Why am I writing? What do I hope to accomplish?
- Who is my audience?
- What kind of information does my audience need for me to accomplish my purpose?

If your purpose is to persuade, but you inform, you won't be successful at communicating your message to your audience.

If you are writing to persuade, but you write for an audience that shares your view, who will you persuade? If your purpose is to complain, then you need to complain—but you need to do so in a way that reaches your audience, right? So, you need to complain with tact; otherwise, your writing will fall on deaf ears.

When you write, you need to think about why you are writing and to whom. You need to tailor your message for your audience.

Let's say that I need to go to the grocery store and pick up a few items. Because I am forgetful, I compose a list of what I need. I am the audience for this piece of writing, and from my list I can go to the grocery store and pick up exactly what I need. However, you could not do the same. Right?

If I wrote on my grocery list "bread," what would you buy me for bread? Whole wheat? White? French? Name brand or store brand? The truth is the word "bread" carries very little specific meaning to an audience. While it is true, you understand the general meaning of the word "bread," you do not



know what I mean when I put “bread” on my grocery list because the word has meaning only to me—I am the audience. If I wanted to accomplish my purpose and get the exact kind of bread I want and you folks are the audience, I would need to provide additional information. I would need to tailor my message for my audience.

So who is my audience?

Identifying your audience will depend on such factors as the nature of the writing (are you writing a letter to a friend, an essay for a class, or a glossary for co-workers?) and what you hope to accomplish, the purpose.

But isn't the professor my audience?

Well, yes and no. Yes, in the sense that your professor will be reading your work to evaluate what you are able to accomplish and to offer feedback to help you improve upon your skills and understanding, but that does not mean that what you are trying to say in a piece of writing is targeted for your professor. If you were writing about a problem in your department in the workplace and proposing suggestions for improvement, would your professor be an appropriate audience? Certainly not. Who would be the target for such a piece of writing? Your direct supervisor would make sense. And co-workers within the department. There may also be other, secondary audiences, perhaps supervisors in all departments or your direct supervisor's boss. In this example, however, it is clear that your professor would not be part of your audience, right?

Understanding your audience is paramount to your success in communicating meaning. Beyond this general purpose of communicating meaning to an audience, you will have a more defined purpose that speaks to the reason why you are writing, your goal. Perhaps your purpose is to explain a process, or to argue your opinion on a debatable topic; perhaps your purpose is to summarize an article, to tell a story, or to complain about bad service at a local eatery. Whenever you write, you always do so to accomplish something in particular, a purpose. Otherwise, why write?

When you write not only do you need to think about who you are writing to, your audience, but you also have to think about why you are writing, your purpose – the two are inextricable, impossible to separate. So, the next time you write, be sure to plan accordingly and think carefully about your audience and purpose. Thanks so much for listening. Happy writing!

