

When embarking on a writing project, most of us think that we must first decide on the topic. In actuality, it is often better to first give consideration to purpose and audience. Both are crucial. No matter the topic, writing that does not fulfill the purpose and/or does not target the audience will be ineffective. So that the time you spend in the writing process proves fruitful, always stay focused on your purpose and audience.

Purpose is what you hope to accomplish in your writing. To get started, ask yourself these questions:

- ◆ Do I want to inform? Persuade? Entertain? Share a meaningful life experience? Explain a process? The answer to this question is your general purpose.
- ◆ What message do I want to convey to my readers about my topic? The answer to this question is your specific purpose. Here are some examples:
 - To inform of the dangers of _____
 - To share the joys of _____
 - To persuade that _____ needs to be better enforced
 - To explain how to _____
 - To compare and contrast _____ and _____
- ◆ What response do I want from my readers?
 - I learned a lot about _____.
 - I now know the differences between _____ and _____.
 - I could now _____ on my own and with ease.
 - I now agree that _____.
 - I value each moment of life I'm given even more.
- ◆ How do I want to be perceived by the people who read this document? Do I desire to be perceived as knowledgeable, insightful, compassionate, persistent, open-minded, etc.?

Audience is the person or people to whom you are writing. When considering audience, ask yourself these questions:

- ◆ Whom would I like my audience to be? Will it be just one reader or will my audience be a group? If it's a group, will members be general or will they share at least one trait?
- ◆ What trait(s) do my audience members have in common, such as age, level of education, gender, interests, experiences, etc.?

- ◆ What topic(s) would my audience find of interest and or of value/usefulness?
- ◆ Are there any topics that would be inappropriate for this audience?
- ◆ Would my audience know the terminology and/or background of the topic(s) I'm considering? In other words, how familiar may my reader(s) be with those topic(s)?
- ◆ Does my audience have preconceived notions or strong opinions about certain topics?
- ◆ Does my audience expect me to be formal or informal in my writing?
- ◆ Does my audience have any expectations on the length of my document?
- ◆ Does my audience have any genre preferences, such as a narrative rather than a satirical essay?
- ◆ What may I need to do or avoid doing so that I would not offend my audience?

Determining your audience and purpose can help you select a topic. In addition, with your purpose and audience clearly in mind, you can set the tone of your writing.