Module: The Writing Process
Understanding Your Audience

Audience: who are they? They are made up of different people from all walks of life. They are people of various ethnic backgrounds, different levels of education, different religious affiliations, different genders, sexual orientation, political views, interests, professions and ways of life. So how can one piece of writing reach all these different people? In order to reach the segment of audience your message is intended for, you must designate a target audience and consider what you know about them. Once you consider a target audience, you can formulate a clear and more direct writing that is built with these audience members in mind.

Four Basic Types of Audience for Academic Writing

General educated audiences are the general public with a certain level of education, have a general knowledge on many topics, and they read various types of publications. They are experienced readers and read to broaden their knowledge. However, they may not be experts in the topic you are writing about.

Specialist Audience on the other hand, do have very thorough knowledge on specific topics and may even be experts in their particular field of interest. One does not need to have a degree or a job in a particular area to be considered a specialist audience. Anyone who has working or life experience in a specific area will have gained enough information and understanding of the topic to be considered a specialist audience.

Your Instructor can be both a general and specific audience, but they interact with your writing differently than the average reader. Your instructor evaluates and accesses your writing, and they function as your coach.

Your Peers are often a target audience since they will be the recipient of the writing and presentations you do for class. They can be considered a general audience, but should not be considered the only audience your writing targets. You should also consider who will best benefit from hearing your message beyond your classmates and instructor.

So what role do you play in your writing?

Depending on your topic and your opinion, you will present information in a certain point of view: subjective point of view as someone who has direct experience with the topic, or an objective point of view as someone from a less biased stance.
Ways to analyze your audience

Who are they?
- Age, gender, economic situation
- Ethnic backgrounds, political philosophies, religious beliefs
- Roles (student, parent, voter, wage earner, property owner, veteran, and other)
- Interests, hobbies

What do they know?
- General level of education
- Specific level of knowledge about topic: Do they know less than you about the subject? as much as you about the subject? more than you about the subject?
- Beliefs: Is the audience likely to agree with your point of view? disagree with your point of view? have no opinion about the topic?
- Interests: Is the audience eager to read about the topic? open to the topic? resistant to or not interested in the topic?

What setting are they reading in?
- Academic setting? Specifically, what subject?
- Workplace setting? Specifically, what business area?

What is their relationship to you?
- Distance and formality: Do you know each other personally or not? Does your audience consist of friends, family, or close peers, or are they more remote?
- Authority: Does your reader have the authority to judge or evaluate you (a supervisor at work, a teacher). Do you have the authority to evaluate your reader, or does this not apply?