



School of Liberal Arts

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Creating Audience Connections with Language

Audience can be one of the most important considerations a writer can consider during the composing process. Working with an audience involves more than merely expressing what we want to say. It involves thinking about how are we going to say what we want to say, and how readers will respond. The following is a list of tips to keep in mind when composing, and therefore, when thinking about how to create a compelling text for an audience. Use these tips to create the sort of text that keeps readers interested and involved because they recognize that the text is being composed with them in mind.

Tip to Begin With: Skilled writers consider their audiences carefully. They often do so by carefully considering the language they are using. (Note: this sort of consideration may not occur until a draft has been already written; sometimes it helps to get our ideas on paper first, then begin to think about our audience.)

Key word to Keep in Mind: *Appropriateness.* Appropriate writing contains language that "fits" the particular audience for whom a text is aimed. What might be a good fit (or appropriate) for one audience may be completely "unfit" or inappropriate for another.

For example: a funeral director would not greet bereaved people with "*Hi, there!*" Instead, he or she might say: "*Good morning. May I take your coat?*"

Another example: Consider TV and magazine ads. A Cover Girl make-up ad that is appropriate for *Cosmopolitan* magazine or a television commercial is created with a young female audience in mind. The same ad, if placed in *Field & Stream*, would be inappropriate for an older, male audience.

Remember: Let decisions about terminology be based on keeping real people in mind, who have different levels of knowledge of the subject.

For example: If you are writing about a medical topic, such as medication usage for nurses, you might include technical or chemistry terms (jargon). In contrast, if that same topic were included in a brochure for patients, the language and organization would look very different.

For Nurses: *Anticoagulants cause a prolonged prothrombin time that can result in surgical hemorrhage if the medication is not discontinued one week prior to the surgery date.*

For Patients: *The medication you are taking is a blood thinner and will make you bleed easily. If you anticipate surgery, be sure your doctor explains when to stop taking the medication.*

Another Tip: Use the words like *naturally* and *of course*, words that signal general agreement, with care. What is natural to some may be foreign to others.

For Example: Note the problem in the following: *Of course, people who go to college are better off financially than those who don't.* (What about millionaires who never set foot in college?)

Use Language to Create Connection between You and Your Readers:

*** **Build bridges, not barriers:** *Let's work to improve . . .* instead of *You must . . .*

*****Eliminate stereotyping:** *All citizens value freedom . . .*"

Most or many would be more appropriate since the writer cannot know for sure what every single person thinks.

Ways to Make Writing Less Sexist and More Reader Friendly:

Original: *A lawyer must pass the bar exam before he can begin to practice.*

Improved: *Lawyers must pass the bar exam before they can begin to practice.*

Improved: *A lawyer must pass the bar exam before beginning practice.*

Instead of These Try These:

<i>male nurse</i>	<i>nurse</i>
<i>mailman</i>	<i>mail carrier</i>
<i>mothering</i>	<i>parenting</i>
<i>little woman</i>	<i>wife, partner</i>
<i>old man</i>	<i>husband, partner, father</i>
<i>fireman</i>	<i>firefighter</i>

Other Groupings & Stereotypes That Might Alienate Audiences:

Age: Do not mention age unless relevant to the text.

Relevant: *The man continued to work as a computer consultant even though he was 76-years-old.*

Not Relevant: *The 76-year-old man attended the staff meeting.*

Class: Avoid terms such as *redneck* or *blue blood*. Try *working class* or *wealthy* instead.

Geographical Stereotypes: Instead of using wording like *All New Englanders are thrifty and tight-lipped*, try *Many New Englanders are known for thriftiness and a quiet demeanor*.

Physical ability or health: Instead of *AIDS victim*, try *person with AIDS*.

Religion: Instead of *All Catholics reject abortion*, use *Many Catholics . . .* or *Most Catholics*.

Sexual orientation: Do not include unless it is relevant to the text.

Relevant: *Senator Pat Smith, an acknowledged homosexual, will speak at the gay rights conference.*

Not relevant: *Senator Smith, a homosexual, is in favor of lowering the national debt.*

Group Affiliation: Avoid terms such as *woman bus driver*, or *a Jewish doctor* when you merely mean *bus driver* or *doctor* instead.

Finally - An Audience Analysis Checklist:

WHO Is the specific audience? Example: *Urban, middle-class teens* rather than *teens*.

HOW will readers use the document? To be informed, entertained, persuaded?

WHAT reaction(s) do you wish to draw from your audience? Surprise? Joy? Disgust?

Sources: Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors. *The St. Martin's Handbook*. 3rd ed. New York: St. Martin's P, 1996. 26-28.
Lunsford and Connors. *The Everyday Writer*. New York: St. Martin's P, 1997. 162.

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