

# Audience and Tone

**Audience-** To write effectively, you need to identify who your readers are and take their expectations into account. Ask yourself the following questions when analyzing your audience.

- What are the readers' ages? What is their gender? What is their education level?
- What interests and needs motivate my audience?
- How much do my readers know about my subject?
- Do they have any misconceptions about the subject?
- What biases do they have about me, my subject, and/or my opinion?
- How do my readers expect me to relate to them?
- What are their political, religious, and other beliefs?
- What values do I share with my readers that will help me communicate with them?

**Tone-** Tone is the writer's attitude towards the topic of the writing. Just as a person's voice may project a range of feelings, writing can convey one or more tones or emotional states, such as enthusiasm, anger, resignation, or joy. Tone reflects the writers' attitude towards their subject, their readers, and their purpose for reading. The question is then how to project an appropriate tone. It is important to pay close attention to sentence structure and word choice.

If a writer wants to adopt a *formal academic tone* in their writing, they should avoid addressing the reader directly (avoid using "you") and the writer should leave themselves out of the writing as much as possible (avoid "I" and "we" and "us"). Also, choose formal words and avoid slang and other types of informal language. Avoid using contractions and indeterminate pronouns such as "it" and "there." Vocabulary and word choice should be appropriate for a college reading level (ex. Avoid "a lot" or "kind of" or "sort of" type phrases).

**Sentence Structure-** Sentence structure refers to the way sentences are put together. There are several ways to improve your sentence structure:

- Vary length and structure. Use a variety of simple, compound and complex sentences. (See **Four Types of Sentences** link or handout)
- Vary sentence beginnings. You don't always have to put the subject first.
- Eliminate unnecessary, redundant, or empty words, and replace wordy phrases.

**Word Choice-** Words have **denotations**, which are dictionary definitions, as well as **connotations**, which are the emotional associations that go beyond the literal meanings of the words. Since tone and meaning are tightly bound, writers must be sensitive to the emotional nuances of words. Remember, readers can't read minds, only the words that have been put on the page. Writers must also choose words that best match their audience's culture and educational background. Don't use slang terms or jargon for an audience who cannot identify with those terms. Always try to avoid confusing or offending the reading audience, as it makes the audience not want to continue reading.

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