

**Success Center
Directed Learning Activity (DLA)**

**Starting Strategies 2:
Recognizing, and Writing with,
Audience and Purpose in Mind**

W009.1

Directed Learning Activity – Starting Strategies 2: Recognizing, and Writing with, Audience and Purpose in Mind

Description: *In this Directed Learning Activity, which does not address essays alone, you will learn how developing an understanding of who you are writing for and why you are writing for them can help you identify the appropriate diction, tone, and level of formality to employ.*

Step One: Reflecting on Audience and Purpose

Almost every time we write or speak, we are writing or speaking to an **audience** – the person or people who will receive our message. We write in order to fulfill some specific **purpose**, or goal, such as to persuade, to inform, or to entertain. Successful writing, then, fulfills two interconnected goals: it effectively reaches its audience, and, in doing so, fulfills its purpose.

Although you might not use the terms *audience* and *purpose* to describe them, an awareness of these concepts likely already informs your choices of words when writing and speaking. For example, when you text your friend to see if she is free on Friday night, your friend is your audience and your purpose is to request information from your friend about her Friday night plans. If you were to, say, call your grandmother and ask about her Friday plans, you would probably use different language when speaking to her than you would when texting your friend. This is because your friend and your grandmother are two different audiences, who have different expectations. Your friend probably expects an informal message, with slang and shortened language – and, possibly, emotion or excitement conveyed through exclamation points and emoticons. When you speak to your grandmother, on the other hand, you probably use language that is clearer and more respectful. She probably expects a more formal, serious conversation.

As you can see, it is likely that you already have an astute understanding of how to adjust the language you use, your tone, and the level of formality of each writing situation in order to best reach your audience and fulfill your purpose. This DLA will focus on further refining that understanding for more effective writing.

Step Two: Writing for Audiences in Everyday Situations

With all of the writing that most of us do in our everyday lives, we are very skilled at adjusting for each audience. To help you understand this, let's practice writing about the same topic for several different audiences.

Imagine the following scenario: You walk out of the library at Cerritos College, and walk into a group of people who are protesting a recent rise in student fees. Without intending to, you have found yourself in the middle of the protest.

Later, you decide to tell your friends and family about the protest – and about the issue the activists were protesting. Practice writing about these subjects for different audiences – for different purposes.

First, you text your best friend to tell him/her or about the event. Below, write the text exactly as you would write it to your friend.

Then, you tell your friends about your experience by posting about it online, either on Facebook, Twitter, or some other social media platform. Now you are writing for a wider audience that probably includes the same friend as above, but might also consist of acquaintances, family member, and co-workers. Below, write the status update, tweet, or other type of post exactly as you would online.

Next, imagine you are describing the same event to your grandmother, or another older relative who lives some distance away. Because of the distance and the person's age, you decide to write a short letter. Below, write the letter exactly as you would for your older relative.

Next, you are going to write about the issue of increasing student fees in an essay for your English class. You are going to briefly describe the protest you witnessed as part of one of your paragraphs in the essay. Below, write that paragraph exactly as you would in an essay for your class.

Finally, after researching these increases in student fees and realizing how they will affect you and your classmates at Cerritos College, you decided to write an email to the president of the college to argue against them. Below, write the first paragraph of that email.

Step Three: Analyzing Writing for Different Audiences

Now, examine the five texts that you've just written. Look at them carefully, and write down your observations. What do you notice about the differences between the five pieces of writing? What are the differences between the words that you chose to use, the attitudes that you conveyed, and the levels of formality or informality in each text? Write your observations below.

You probably noticed that the text message and online post used more informal language. Perhaps you used slang and acronyms (like *LOL* or *OMG*). However, you probably used more formal language when writing the letter to your older relative, the paragraph for your English essay, and the email to the president of the college. If this is the case, then you have a clear understanding of the needs and expectations of each different audience.

Step Four: Understanding Purpose

Every piece of writing has some sort of purpose – its aim or goal; otherwise, there would be no point in writing. The purpose *is* the point!

Most written texts have more than one purpose. Here are some common purposes for writing:

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| to inform | to persuade | to entertain |
| to call readers to action | to change attitudes | to analyze |
| to argue | to evaluate | to recommend |
| to request | to propose | to provoke thought |
| to express feelings | to define | to summarize |

In Step Two above, you wrote to different audiences about an experience you had on campus. What purposes did you hope to fulfill in writing to those four audiences? Remember that you might have the same or similar purposes each time.

What was your purpose when texting your friend about the protest you experienced on campus?

What was your purpose when posting about the event online?

What was your purpose when writing a letter to your older relative?

What was your purpose when including the event in an essay for your English class?

What was your purpose when writing an email to the president of the college?

Step Five: Understanding Diction, Tone, and Formality

Writers must constantly make choices about **diction**, **tone**, and **formality** in their writing, and the choices they make depend on the purpose and audience of the text. **Diction** refers to the words an author uses. **Tone** describes the attitude or emotion conveyed through the text. Lastly, the level of **formality** determines whether a text is formal, somber, proper, or serious versus informal, casual, or lighthearted.

Examine the two short excerpts below. Both are about parenting, but written for different audiences.

Example 1 – An excerpt from *hollyscoop.com*, a celebrity gossip website:

Jennifer Hudson, who is mom to two year-old David Otunga, Jr., has some advice to give her pal, Beyonce.

“Girl, get your sleep!” Hudson said during a press event for *Good Housekeeping* in New York City on Tuesday.

Well, that sounds easy enough.

“We talked about this when I had my munchkin. It goes so fast. She’s going to look up and [Blue]’s going to be six months. Next thing you know, she’s going to be walking.”

In addition to taking naps, Hudson’s other advice is to not take the little moments for granted.

Example 2 – An excerpt from *Psychological Bulletin*, a scholarly journal:

Despite broad consensus about the effects of parenting practices on child development, many questions about the construct parenting style remain unanswered. Particularly pressing issues are the variability in the effects of parenting style as a function of the child’s cultural background, the processes through which parenting style influences the child’s development, and the operationalization of parenting style.

What do you notice about the types of words each author uses?

What do you notice about the tone – the emotion or attitude – of each excerpt? Is it happy, sad, excited, serious, or something else? How do you know?

What do you notice about the level of formality of each excerpt? Is it formal – serious and proper? Or is it informal – casual and lighthearted? How do you know?

Based on your observations, who do you think is the intended audience for each excerpt? How do you know?

What is the intended purpose of each excerpt? How do you know?

Step Six: Determining Your Audience and Purpose Before You Write

As you can see, the choices writers make in constructing their texts are directly impacted by the audiences they target and the purposes they pursue. Additionally, and importantly, no two writing situations are exactly alike. Before you begin a writing task, take a few minutes to decide on your purpose(s) and identify your audience. Then, analyze your audience to determine how best to meet their expectations in order to fulfill your purpose.

Before beginning any writing assignment, first ask yourself the following questions: Who is my audience? What is my purpose? If you have an assignment prompt with you, use it for the following activity. Otherwise, refer to the sample writing prompt below.

Sample Writing Prompt

In his article, “Clive Thompson on the New Literacy,” Thompson argues that new technologies like social networking websites are actually helping young people to acquire the skills necessary for academic writing, despite critics who claim that new technologies undermine literacy skills. What is your position on this issue? Take a stance, and write a persuasive essay that attempts to convince the reader of your position.

Use your assignment prompt or the sample above to answer the following questions.

Does the prompt give you any clues as to the purpose of your essay? What are those clues? What do you think the purpose of your essay is?

Based on the topic and on what the assignment asks you to do, who do you think is the intended audience of this essay? How do you know? What are the expectations of that particular audience, in terms of word choice, level of formality, appropriate tone, and length of sentences and paragraphs?

As you write your essay, always keep your audience and purpose in mind. Choose the words, tone, and level of formality that will most effectively reach that audience in order to fulfill your purpose. In practicing this, you are on your way to successful writing!

PRINT STUDENT NAME

STUDENT #

Tutor Feedback:

_____ In Step Two, the student wrote five times, for five different audiences, about a protest on campus.

_____ In Step Three, the student made specific observations about his or her writing from Step Two. The observations demonstrate that the student recognizes the differences in word choices.

_____ In Step Four, the student identified a clear purpose – or purposes – for each of the five texts.

_____ In Step Five, the student mentions specific differences between the two examples, demonstrating that he or she understands how audience and purpose determine the choices an author makes.

_____ In Step Six, the student identifies possible audience(s) and purpose(s) for an essay responding to either his or her prompt or on the sample prompt provided. The student’s responses should demonstrate an understanding of the audience’s expectations.

Additional Comments:

PRINT INSTRUCTOR/TUTOR NAME

DATE

INSTRUCTOR/TUTOR SIGNATURE

STUDENT – DO NOT FORGET TO TURN THIS SHEET IN AT THE FRONT DESK!

You may not get credit for completing this DLA if you fail to leave this sheet with the front desk receptionist.