

Writing Activities

Language Activity 1: Audience, Purpose, and Tone

Before we can begin to write, we need to answer two basic questions: for whom are we writing, and what is our purpose for writing? The answers to these questions will actually help you determine the strategies, type of communication, and level of formality you will use.

Audience

Let's look first at audience. We always need to remember that our audience's interests, goals, and motivations are not the same as our own. We are more likely to accomplish our purpose if we appeal to the audience's interests than by trying to convince them that our interests should be theirs, too.

We begin then by asking who the primary and secondary audiences for each document are. The primary audience is the person/group that is the recipient. Think of it as the to: in an email. The secondary audiences are those who overtly or covertly receive the communication (cc: and bcc: in email format). Additionally, the secondary audiences are those who might only hear about the communication from the primary or secondary audiences. Never assume your message will only go to the person listed after Dear... in a letter. For example, how would your reaction be different if you learned that one of your colleagues had been fired by email or by their supervisor in person?

Exercise A

Look at the pairs of sentences, and decide which is best suited for the specified audience to whom you are speaking or writing. The first one has been done for you.

Example:

- A To your spouse
- A. You need a raise because we need a new car and a new roof on the house.
 - B. You need a raise because you have done such a great job with the clients.
1. _____ To your boss
- A. You deserve a raise because you need a new car and a new roof on the house.
 - B. You deserve a raise because you have done such a great job with the clients.
2. _____ To your instructor
- A. You deserve an A in the class because you will lose your scholarship if you don't get one.
 - B. You deserve an A in the class because you wrote the best research paper even if it did contain a few spelling errors.
3. _____ To the judge in traffic court
- A. You shouldn't have to pay the traffic ticket because a branch of a tree was hiding the NO PARKING SIGN.
 - B. You shouldn't have to pay the traffic ticket because you didn't see the NO PARKING SIGN.
4. _____ To your boss
- A. He should pay for your English lessons since it will increase your usefulness to the firm.
 - B. He should pay for your English lessons since he paid for your colleague's last year.
5. _____ To your instructor
- A. You should be allowed to take another class because the instructor you have doesn't like international students.
 - B. You should be allowed to take another class because you had one very similar in your home country.

Purpose

Next we need to consider our purpose, such as reporting on an event, persuading, informing, giving opinions, or describing a purpose. When we combine each of these purposes with what we know about different primary and secondary audiences, we can begin to write or even to realize that written communication may not be the best choice.

Exercise B

Give one example for each of the common purposes in legal writing.

1. To relate an incident: _____
2. To describe a person or thing: _____
3. To explain a process: _____
4. To request information: _____
5. To give an opinion: _____

Tone

You also need to consider tone or how you address your audience. Do you want to write a formal or an informal letter or email? Are you going to be polite or impolite? In spoken English our tone is often heard—friendly or angry, polite or impolite; however, in writing our word choice is what people “hear” for tone. For example, a polite way to phrase a request would be, *Would you please send the brief to us by Friday?* An impolite request would be, *Send the brief by Friday* or even *Please send the brief by Friday*. Both impolite requests are phrased as commands without the softening of a modal. With friends, we often use what would be considered impolite with strangers to make requests, as in *Pass me the brief*. For more information, see Modals and Semi-Modals, page 229.