



# Informative / Explanatory Writing

## Audience Awareness

### High School

#### Rationale

- ✚ Strong writers must consider audience, and high school students are often unaware of their audience when they begin a composition. Audience impacts the style and tone of a piece of writing, and an awareness of audience clarifies the writing.

#### Goal

- ✚ To analyze the effects of audience on essay writing

#### Standards

- ✚ **W.9.4, W.10.4, W.11.4, W.12.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

#### Objectives

- ✚ Students will develop a piece of writing based on its target audience.
- ✚ Students will evaluate the effectiveness of an essay for its intended audience.

#### Materials

- ✚ An informational prompt about a subject the class has been learning about. If they have not been covering anything adaptable, consider a general topic students should know about, such as the US Presidency, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or summer vacation.
- ✚ Paper strips indicating a variety of audiences

#### Procedure

*(Note – this lesson may take 2 days, depending on the speed of students' writing and the prompt chosen.)*

- ✚ Have students consider how they dress and act differently in different situations. For example, how would their demeanor change from attending a rock concert to singing at a Presidential inauguration to going for a walk with your best friend? Point out that each situation demands different attitudes, speech, and attire. The same is true in writing, but in writing we call this considering your audience.
- ✚ Provide the writing prompt. Have students discuss, in small groups, what they would write about in their response.
- ✚ Next, have student groups or pairs draw a strip of paper from a hat. On these strips of paper are different audiences. Students will work together to write the prompt directed to that audience.
- ✚ Ask students what they would consider when addressing that audience. Good ideas include:

- Background knowledge
  - Experience regarding the subject
  - Familiarity between author and audience
  - Maturity or ability to understand the content
  - Amount of respect that is expected
  - Length (some audiences will be able to read or sit still for longer than others)
  - Word choice and vocabulary
  - Interest and motivation of the audience
- ✚ Give students at least 40 minutes to brainstorm and develop a short essay, speech, or presentation about the subject. Then distribute the “Guess the Audience” handout. Ask students to take notes during each presentation before inferring the intended audience.
  - ✚ After each student presentation (or at the end of class, if you prefer), give students a chance to share their thoughts on who each intended audience was and why. Require students to include evidence to support their inferences.
  - ✚ Closing: Have students share their thoughts on modifying and preparing for their intended audiences. Ask students to explain how the audience affects their approaches to the material.

### **Teacher Tips**

- ✚ Students tend to love opportunities to act or dramatize events. Consider an activity in which the class (or “audience”) is let in on the intended audience. Have the students act the part of that particular audience, whether it is rowdy patrons at a comedy clubs, grade school kids at summer camp, or veterans at an honorary luncheon.
- ✚ If necessary, this activity could be modified so that students work individually.
- ✚ Consider acting out roles for each of the student’s presentations. For example, if the audience is supposed to be a group of tired kindergarten kids, make it authentic by acting it up and seeing how each student responds. Alternatively, you could ask for student volunteers to play these roles.
- ✚ Some other possible intended audiences might include a group of veteran teachers, a group of political supporters, a hostile group of parents, sixth grade summer campers, kids at a day care center, members of a bowling league, a church luncheon, etc.

### **Extension Activities**

- ✚ When students read independently or in groups in your class, ask them to explain who the intended audience is and how they know.
- ✚ For one of their essay assignments, have students use their parents or respected adults as their intended audience. Then ask students to share their writing with a parent or adult. Have that adult write a response to the piece, including whether or not he thought it was appropriate for him.
- ✚ Whenever students write, try to make the activity as authentic as possible. Coordinate with other teachers and make arrangements for some or all students to visit grade school classrooms and deliver their speeches or essays. Have the grade school teacher (or students) explain whether or not he thought the material was audience-appropriate.
- ✚ Have students make joke books for different age groups and audience types. Encourage students to choose jokes that are appropriate for each audience (give students a minimum

number of different audiences). Finally, have students share their jokes with the class and have the class evaluate appropriateness.

- ✚ Have students consider how knowing your audience would be important in a job interview. Have students write two scenarios: one in which the audience was approached correctly and one in which the target audience was missed. Ask students to reflect on the consequences of such an error.
- ✚ Ask students to conduct a survey in which they interview at least four adults and ask how audience awareness impacts you into adulthood. Have students compare their results with others in the class.

Audiences

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| A Kindergarten class   |
| Your teacher or your parents   |
| Another high school English class from a different school                |
| A 5 <sup>th</sup> grade class  |
| A group of experts about the subject                                     |
| A reader for a formal test (imagine this assignment is on a state test!) |
| A group of adults from another country<br>(yes, they speak English!)     |
| A group of businesspeople  |
| Another group of students from this school                               |
| Students staying after school or missing free time to attend             |

## Guess the Audience!

Use clues from your classmates' performances to help you infer their intended audience. Be sure to write the name of your classmates in the left margin for each row of evidence.

| Word Choice | Tone/Demeanor | Other Hints or Devices | And the Audience Is... |
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