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Identifying Author's Intention & Attitude

In this chapter, you will:

1. read articles from academic sources.
2. identify author's intention & attitude in a text.

Author's Intention

Readers need to consider why an author has written a passage. This is called author's intention or author's purpose. Along with all the skills and strategies you have already learned so far, the purpose an author has for writing is very important to consider in order to help you determine the main idea.

When an author writes, he or she has a purpose in mind.

There are two broad purposes an author may have in writing academic texts:

- to inform
- to persuade

Of course, all authors try to be informative and persuasive to some extent. For our purposes, however, there is a distinct difference between these two reasons for writing. These different reasons for writing can often be recognized by the use of specific language that reveals the author's intention. Sometimes an author can have more than one purpose. For example, an author can aim to inform and persuade. However, as in patterns of organization, one purpose is predominant, and this purpose is reflected in the author's most important point.

Under each of these two broad purposes, there is a list of more specific purposes. The following table is not exhaustive; authors could easily have purposes that are not listed on this table.

Informative		Persuasive	
to inform	to advise	to persuade	to criticise
to describe	to explain	to influence	to justify
to define	to illustrate	to argue	to convince
to review	to notify	to recommend	to evaluate

To Inform

An author may write to inform or explain. In other words, an author wants to **present information in an objective manner without imposing his or her opinion on the reader**. The author is trying to **provide only information to educate readers**.

In this case, the author does not want to convince the reader of his or her point of view. The sole purpose of the writing is to convey information in an unbiased manner. If an author wants to inform or explain, his or her purpose is unbiased, or objective, with no agenda or point of view to put forward in order to persuade the reader. The author is just **presenting the facts** and is **not giving any sort of personal opinion about the facts**; the author is **not promoting a point of view** or **not taking a side**.

Newspaper stories or articles are examples of writing where an author's purpose is to inform. The story will contain information about who, what, where, when, why, or how. Nowhere in these stories does the author say what he or she thinks or what you, the reader, should think. You are left to form your own conclusion based on the provided information. The author may quote someone else's opinion, but will not state his or her own.

Similarly, the purpose of most authors of textbooks is to inform. The author of a manufacturing engineering textbook, for example, does not tell you what to think about lean manufacturing, he or she just gives you the facts. His or her purpose is purely to inform.

Author's Intention	Typical Reading Materials	Vocabulary
To inform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News articles • Lectures • Textbooks • Expository essays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straightforward • Factual

To Persuade

Sometimes an author wants to **persuade the reader to adopt a stance on an issue**. The author, then, has something about which he or she wants to convince the reader. Even if the author's argument is one with which you agree, if that author **tries to get the reader to choose a side**—usually the author's side—then his or her main purpose is to persuade.

In persuasive writing, an author uses biased words that reveal the author's stance on an issue. Not only does an author use words that sometimes indicate the bias or one-sidedness of a position on an issue, but he or she also may use words or phrases such as *should*, *ought to*, or *must*. Words like these always reveal a persuasive purpose, as the author is putting forward an opinion. The author's intent, then, is to change the reader's mind.

Just as a news story is a good example of informative writing, a newspaper editorial is a good illustration of a persuasive piece of writing. Editorials, usually in the middle of the first section of the newspaper, contain essays that express the opinions of the writers about some topic currently in the news. The authors of these essays take a stance on the issue and try to persuade the reader to agree with and accept their point of view; their purpose is to convince the reader to agree with them.

In universities, you are likely to read persuasive texts in classes where a central focus is on issues open to debate, such as those offered in disciplines like history, and the sciences. You will likely read many persuasive essays in your English classes, though some of these essays will also have the purpose to inform.

Author's Intention	Typical Reading Materials	Vocabulary
To persuade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News reports • Argumentative essays • Opinion essays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words that express opinion (refer Chapter 4) • Words that express point of view: adjectives like <i>terrible</i>, <i>wonderful</i>, <i>suspicious</i>, etc.

A) Identify the author's intention based on the paragraphs below. Give reasons to your answer.

Paragraph 1

TACKLING OBESITY

Foods that are high in fat, such as pizza and potato chips, and those high in refined sugar, like chocolate and sweets, should be taxed. In Denmark, there is now a tax on products that contain more than 2.3% of saturated fat. Besides, Malaysia has also implemented tax sugar to address the obesity problems in the country in 1 July. The tax is imposed on sweetened beverages at 40 sen per litre on packaged sweetened drinks. This would make junk foods and sweetened beverages too expensive for people to buy in large quantities. Because obesity is becoming a major problem worldwide, we should discourage people from eating fats and sugars. Hence, we should impose a tax on foods that are high in fat and high in refined sugar.

Author's Intention	
Reasons	

*Paragraph 2***MIND CONTROL**

BrainGate is the idea of Professor John Donoghue and his team of researchers at the Brown Institute for Brain Science, Rhode Island, USA, who investigate how humans change thoughts in the brain into movements. BrainGate is attached directly to the brain. First of all, gold wires are put into the part of the brain that controls movement. These are then connected to a small computer chip which is just a few millimetres in size. When the person thinks about different movements, this creates electrical signals, which are picked up by the chip. After this, the signals that are created by the brain are sent back to a computer, which changes the signals into movements. Finally, the computer uses the robotic arm to carry out these movements. BrainGate can already be used to write an e-mail, operate the TV remote control or even play computer games, just by brain power.

Author's Intention	
Reasons	

Author's Attitude

The author's attitude, or tone, is **expressed through the words and details** he or she selects.

For example, textbooks are usually written with an objective tone which includes facts and reasonable explanations. The objective tone is neutral. The details are mostly facts. On the other hand, essays are usually written with a subjective tone. A subjective tone uses words that describe feelings, judgments, or opinions. The details are likely to include experiences, senses, feelings, and thoughts.

Some adjectives to describe author's attitude are:

appreciative, critical, defensive, disagreeing, disappointed, empathetic, frustrated, impartial, informative, persuasive, objective, negative, positive, etc.

To determine the author's tone, you must notice how certain words and details are used within the text.

Consider this extract from a text entitled *Death Penalty* and determine the author's underlying attitude, or tone as well as which words reveal his/ her feelings about the issue:

How many prisoners today have received a far worse sentence – death – for crimes they did not commit? At a time when we have faced the death penalty with unseemly enthusiasm, this question ought to haunt prosecutors, judges, and juries.

Here, the author is certainly not objective. He/ she is clearly opposed to the death penalty. His tone is one of horror. The word *haunt* implies that some grave injustice has been done and that those people will be tormented by the errors made. Similarly, *unseemly* means not proper. Here, the writer clearly is critical of those people who support the death penalty. Again, the author chose to use words that convey disgust at the justice system. Therefore, it can be said that his/ her tone is anger.

The tone in the following excerpt is one of thankfulness and gratitude toward those who serve justice. The underlined phrase is the evidence.

The staff and lawyers of not-for-profit legal clinic deserve the gratitude of all who pray for justice, for the clinic's mission is nothing less than the overturning of injustice.

B) Identify the author's intention and attitude based on the paragraphs below. State the words or details that reflect that author's attitude.

Paragraph 1

OUR DESERT OCEAN

Modern fishing methods are unsystematic. Everything is caught, not just the fish species targeted. These unlucky fish and other marine animals, known as “bycatch,” are often thrown back dead into the sea. They may not have commercial value, but they are essential to the marine ecosystem. Other destructive fishing methods include cyanide fishing, where fish are poisoned to make them easier to catch, and dynamite fishing, where fish are killed by underwater explosions. Both these methods degrade and sometimes destroy the marine environment.

Author's Intention	
Author's Attitude	
Reasons	

*Paragraph 2***TRAFFIC CONGESTION**

There are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce road congestion. The most obvious solutions involve engineering. This means building more roads with wider lanes so that more cars can travel at the same time. Tunnels and bridges can be constructed in order to reduce the congestion that happens when cars have to stop at traffic lights. A more popular solution, therefore, would be to encourage other forms of transport which will lead to fewer cars on the road. One suggestion is to encourage people to cycle more. This mode of transport has obvious health benefits and reduces air pollution.

Author's Intention	
Author's Attitude	
Reasons	

*Paragraph 3***PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism is when you hand in work for an assessment and part or all of the work is not your own. It is considered a serious matter in academic institutions. If a student plagiarises someone else's work, they may lose grades or fail part or all of their course. Typical examples of plagiarism include copying material from another sources, handling in work that is not entirely your own, presenting any idea, argument, et cetera as your own, and handling in work for assessment that has already been assessed somewhere else.

Author's Intention	
Author's Attitude	
Reasons	

*Paragraph 4***ENERGY CONSUMPTION**

According to McKinney, Schoch, and Yonavjak (2007), world energy consumption nearly doubled between 1970 and 2000, and is set to double again between 2000 and 2030. With the vast majority of energy being provided by limited stocks of fossil fuels, and their known impact on the environment, it is perhaps not surprising that many people consider these world energy consumption levels to be dangerously high. While this growth has gone hand in hand with population growth, it has been worsened by the fact that people's consumption patterns are increasing - rising standards of living have further impacted on the levels of consumption.

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