Reader-Centered Writing

Writing can be conceptualized as **writer-centered** or **reader-centered**. Things like diaries and journals are primarily writer-centered, in that they are written for the benefit of the writer. Technical communications require that you shift this mindset and write for the benefit of your reader—or design the content and structure of your communication for your "user." This mindset should be informed by an understanding of your audience. Use these guidelines and ask yourself the following questions:

- **Who is my target audience?** Are they internal or external readers? Upstream, downstream or lateral from you? Do I have multiple readers?
- **What is their perspectives on the topic, on me, and on the document I will write?** What are they expecting to do with the document? What is the document meant to accomplish? Why has it been requested? What is my role and relationship to my readers? What does the reader need to know? Already know? What does my reader NOT need to have explained?
- **What is my goal or purpose in writing to these readers?** What am I trying to communicate? What do I want them to do as a result of reading this document? How can I plan the content to meet my readers' needs?
- **What is my reader's goal?** Why does this audience want or need to read this document?

Audience analysis

Audience analysis is the process of gathering information about the people in your audience so that you can understand their needs, expectations, beliefs, values, attitudes, and likely opinions. A good audience analysis takes time, thought, preparation, implementation, and processing. If done well, it will yield information that will help you interact effectively with your audience. Professional speakers, corporate executives, sales associates, and entertainers all rely on audience analysis to connect with their listeners. So do political candidates, whose chances of gaining votes depend on crafting the message and mood to appeal to each specific audience respectively. One audience might be preoccupied with jobs, another with property taxes, and another with crime. Similarly, your audience analysis should help you identify the interests of your audience.

Three Types of Audience Analysis

While audience analysis does not guarantee against errors in judgment, it will help you make good choices in topic, language, style of presentation, and other aspects of your speech.

1. **Demographic Analysis**

Demographic information includes factors such as gender, age range, marital status, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. In your public speaking class, you probably already know how many students are male and female, their approximate ages, and so forth. But how can you assess the demographics of an audience ahead of time if you have had no previous contact with them? In many cases, you can ask

the person or organization that has invited you to speak; it's likely that they can tell you a lot about the demographics of the people who are expected to come to hear you.

2. Psychographic Analysis

Psychographic information includes things like values, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs. Values are the foundation of any communication model. "A value expresses a judgment of what is desirable and undesirable, right and wrong, or good and evil. Values are usually stated in the form of a word or phrase. For example, most of us probably share the values of equality, freedom, honesty, fairness, justice, good health, and family. These values compose the principles or standards we use to judge and develop our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors."

3. Situational Analysis

The next type of analysis is called the situational audience analysis because it focuses on characteristics related to the specific speaking situation. The situational audience analysis can be divided into two main questions:

1. How many people came to hear my speech and why are they here? What events, concerns, and needs motivated them to come? What is their interest level, and what else might be competing for their attention?
2. What is the physical environment of the speaking situation? What is the size of the audience, layout of the room, existence of a podium or a microphone, and availability of digital media for visual aids? Are there any distractions, such as traffic noise?

EXERCISE: Audience analysis

Choose one of the topics below. Then perform an audience analysis, using the questions above to gain an understanding of the needs of different audiences. Write a profile of your intended reader(s) and consider what sort of information they will need and why?

1. You have been asked to write a report on **Maintaining Internet Privacy** for
   a) A new internet user who just signed up for internet service
   b) A start up e-commerce website developer
2. Prepare a document on **Food-born Diseases** for
   a) Restaurant workers (servers and kitchen staff)
   b) For a health inspector training course
3. Provide information on a proposed **New Bus Shelter Design** to
   a) Mayor's office
   b) Contractor
   c) Newspaper reporter writing an article on the issue