Consider your audience

Pose questions about the readers of your research project to determine what kinds of sources and evidence they will find most persuasive.

For an overview of related key topics on planning a paper, visit the videos and quizzes in this tutorial.

Explore It

For any academic writing project it is important to consider your audience. In many—but not all—cases your audience will be simply your instructor or members of your class. A clear understanding of who your audience is and what they know and care about will help you craft an effective research paper. You’ll be able to address your audience’s needs and expectations for evidence, information, language, word choice, and other details as you write. Analyze your audience’s needs and then consider what will be persuasive and appropriate for your particular audience.

Learn It

Before you begin any academic assignment, take time to do a careful analysis of your audience. What you learn when you consider your audience’s needs and expectations will help you engage and persuade them. To engage your audience, you will show them that you’ve chosen a topic that relates to things they know and care about.
GUIDELINES FOR ANALYZING YOUR AUDIENCE

• Who is your desired audience? What do they expect? What is your relationship with them, and how do you want these readers to hear your voice? What tone do you need to convey?

• What do you know about your audience's background? Their education and demographics?

• What does your audience already know about your topic? What have they heard, read, or personally experienced? What do you need to define or explain as background? What questions would they want answered?

• What preconceptions or biases might your audience have? What attitudes do they already have about your topic?

• What kinds of information, evidence, and reasons would your audience find credible and effective?

• What would readers value in terms of layout and format? Are there visuals they will expect?

After you have established a clear sense of your intended readers, consider specific ways to appeal to their values and opinions. For example, take care with the words and language you use. Consider carefully whether your audience will need terms or specialized jargon defined, then offer definitions for those terms that are likely to be unclear or unfamiliar. You can make sure your readers feel included by using particular pronouns (*we* as opposed to *you*). But be careful when using *us* or *we* to address your readers. Don’t make assumptions about readers’ views or values or presume to include readers in a group unless you have reason to believe they already feel included.

Consider also whether your examples and evidence are appropriate for your audience. Appropriate evidence invites readers in and can encourage them to relate to your point. On the other hand, poorly chosen examples can cause readers to disconnect. For example, they might be too personal or informal, or too obscure or complicated. Use examples that you believe your specific audience will be able to relate to.

**Use It**

In order to connect with or influence your readers, you should know as much as you can about them. Consider a topic for a current or recent research project and make notes answering the questions in the guidelines for analyzing your audience, above. Keep in mind the kind of impact you hope to have on your audience. If possible, identify a member of your audience and ask questions about their views and knowledge about your topic. Also take time to put yourself in your audience’s place and imagine what you would want to know while reading your research project. What kinds of evidence and reasons would be most credible and effective? Use what you learn from these answers to write a brief paragraph analyzing the knowledge, attitudes, and expectations of your audience.