





## The Writing Variables

**The central idea** is the main point or thought that you are trying to express. It may be one statement like a thesis statement or it may be a paragraph or two exploring an idea or theme.

**Forms** The ability to shape and organize ideas requires choosing a form that is appropriate to the audience and purpose. Some examples include:

- personal experience narratives
  - autobiographies
  - biographies
  - fictional narratives (e.g., short stories and novellas)
  - diaries
  - journal entries
  - learning logs
  - poetry (e.g., ballads, acrostics, counted-syllable formats, free verse, song lyrics, other formats)
  - parodies
  - essays
  - research reports
  - reviews
  - news stories
  - editorials and opinions
  - advertisements
  - correspondence (e.g., friendly letters; invitations; letters of thanks, complaint, application, sympathy, inquiry, protest, congratulation, apology)
  - scripts (e.g., skits, plays, radio plays, TV commercials)
  - oral histories
  - eulogies and last will and testaments
  - speeches
  - memoranda and messages
  - instructions and advice
  - rules and regulations
  - minutes and forms
  - pamphlets
  - résumés and cover letters.
  - blogs
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**Purpose** is the reason or reasons why a person composes a particular piece of writing. Focusing on purpose as one writes helps a person to know what form of writing to choose, how to focus and organize the writing, what kinds of evidence to cite, how formal or informal the writing style should be, and how much should be written. The eleven different types of purpose include the following:

1. to express;
  2. to describe;
  3. to explore/learn, clarify, reflect;
  4. to entertain;
  5. to inform;
  6. to explain, report, instruct;
  7. to argue;
  8. to persuade;
  9. to evaluate;
  10. to problem solve; and
  11. to mediate.
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An **audience** is a group of readers who reads a particular piece of writing. Our audience might be teachers, classmates, the president of an organization, the staff of a management company, or any other number of possibilities. Audiences come in all shapes and sizes. They may be a group of similar people or combinations of different groups of people. Writers need to determine who they are in order to analyze the audience and write effectively.

When we speak to someone face-to-face, we always know with whom we are talking. We automatically adjust our speech to be sure we communicate our message. For instance, when we talk to three-year olds, we shorten sentences and use simpler words. When we talk to college professors, we use longer sentences and more formal language. In short, we change what we say because we know our **audience**.

Interestingly, many writers do not make the same adjustments when they write to different audiences, usually because they do not take the time to think about who will be reading what they write. But to be sure that we communicate clearly in writing, we need to adjust our message—how we say it and what information we include—by recognizing that different readers can best understand different messages.

The **context** is the situation in which your audience will hear, view or read your text. So if you are writing a short story for teen audiences on the coming of age, your context could be that it appears in a short story anthology in the library of a high school. Another example would be if you were writing a eulogy for a deceased cousin, the context would be that the eulogy is read at evening prayers and then at the funeral of your cousin. Subsequently, if you were writing a letter to the editor about tragic effects of the oil spill off of the Gulf Coast, the context would be in a national or local newspaper, even giving the specific name of the paper.