Audience Analysis
Who is your audience?

Knowing your audience is vital to writing an effective paper. For example, a formal tone and technical jargon may work well for textbooks but not for a personal e-mail. Slang may be perfectly acceptable in personal communication, but it could keep your editorial out of the newspaper.

A change in your intended audience can change the whole look and feel of your essay, but sometimes it can be difficult to imagine who would be reading your essay (besides your instructor). So how do you describe a group of people you have never met? Here are some questions you can ask yourself to help you better define your audience.

Demographics – What characteristics does your audience share?

- Does your audience have a common age, race, gender, or religious background?
- How well educated is your audience? Do they have high school diplomas? College degrees?
- What do the members of your audience do for a living? Are they executives? Teachers? Stay-at-home parents?

Social Context – Where might your audience read your essay?

- In what type of publication would your essay appear? A trade magazine? A newspaper? An academic journal?
- What is your audience's attitude toward your topic? Do they already agree with you? Are they hostile to your point of view?
- How do you want to approach your audience? Will you present yourself as an authority? Will you appeal to their emotions? To their logic/reason?

Familiarity – How familiar is your audience with your topic?

- What does your audience already know about your topic?
- How does your audience relate to your topic? Is it something they need to know about? Are they simply interested in learning more about your topic?
- Are there any complex or technical terms that need to be defined?

This is not a complete list, and you don't need to answer all of these questions for every paper you write. Think of them as prompts to help you to clarify for whom you are writing and to give some direction to your papers.

*And here's a hint: if you are writing a rhetorical analysis, these same questions can be very helpful in identifying the intended audience for a given article. Turn the questions around and ask, for example, "Who is this author's audience?"