

# Rhetorical Situations

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## Purpose 1

All writing has a purpose. We write to explore our thoughts and emotions, to express ourselves, to entertain; we write to record words and events, to communicate with others, to try to persuade others to believe as we do or to behave in certain ways. In fact, we often have several purposes at the same time. We may write an essay in which we try to explain something to an audience, but at the same time we may be trying to persuade that audience of something. Look, for example, at this passage from a 2012 *New York Times* op-ed essay by economist and editorial columnist Paul Krugman about social and economic trends among “the traditional working-class family” — declining rates of marriage and of male participation in the labor force and increasing numbers of out-of-wedlock births. Krugman asserts that the primary reason for those statistics is a “drastic reduction in the work opportunities available to less-educated men”:

Most of the numbers you see about income trends in America focus on households rather than individuals, which makes sense for some purposes. But when you see a modest rise in incomes for the lower tiers of the income distribution, you have to realize that all — yes, all — of this rise comes from the women, both because more women are in the paid labor force and because women’s wages aren’t as much below male wages as they used to be.

For lower-education working men, however, it has been all negative. Adjusted for inflation, entry-level wages of male high school graduates have fallen 23 percent since 1973. Meanwhile, employment benefits have collapsed. In 1980, 65 percent of recent high-school graduates working in the private sector had health benefits, but, by 2009, that was down to 29 percent.

So we have become a society in which less-educated men have great difficulty finding jobs with decent wages and good benefits.

—Paul Krugman, “Money and Morals”

Krugman is reporting information here, outlining how the earnings and benefits of less-educated men have dropped over the last forty years. He is also making an argument, that these economic setbacks are the cause of the social ills among working-class Americans and not, as some would have it, the result of them. (Krugman, writing for a newspaper, is also using a style — including dashes, contractions, and other informal elements — that strives to be engaging while it informs and argues.)

Even though our purposes may be many, knowing our primary reason for writing can help us shape that writing and understand how to proceed with it. Our purpose can determine the genre we choose, our audience, even the way we design what we write.

**Identify your purpose.** While a piece of writing often has many purposes, a writer usually focuses on one. When you get an assignment or see a need to write, ask yourself what the primary purpose of the writing task is: to entertain? to inform? to persuade? to demonstrate your knowledge or your writing ability? What are your own goals? What are your audience's expectations, and do they affect the way you define your purpose?

### Thinking about Purpose

- What do you want your audience to do, think, or feel? How will they use what you tell them?
- What does this writing task call on you to do? Do you need to show that you have mastered certain content or skills? Do you have an assignment that specifies a particular **STRATEGY** or **GENRE** — to compare two things, perhaps, or to argue a position?
- What are the best ways to achieve your purpose? What kind of **STANCE** should you take? Should you write in a particular genre? Do you have a choice of **MEDIUM** and does your text require any special format or **DESIGN** elements?

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Who will read (or hear) what you are writing? A seemingly obvious but crucially important question. Your audience affects your writing in various ways. Consider a piece of writing as simple as a text from a mother to her son:

*Pls. take chicken out to thaw and feed Annye. Remember Dr. Wong at 4.*

On the surface, this brief note is a straightforward reminder to do three things. But in fact it is a complex message filled with compressed information for a specific audience. The writer (the mother) counts on the reader (her son) to know a lot that can be left unsaid. She expects that he knows that the chicken is in the freezer and needs to thaw in time to be cooked for dinner; she knows that he knows who Annye is (a pet?), what he or she is fed, and how much; she assumes that he knows who (and where) Dr. Wong is. She doesn't need to spell any of that out because she knows what her son knows and what he needs to know — and in her text she can be brief. She understands her audience. Think how different such a reminder would be were it written to another audience — a babysitter, perhaps, or a friend helping out while Mom is out of town.

What you write, how much you write, how you phrase it, even your choice of **GENRE** (memo, essay, email, note, speech) — all are influenced by the audience you envision. And your audience will interpret your writing according to their own expectations and experiences, not yours.

When you are a student, your audience is most often your teachers, so you need to be aware of their expectations and know the conventions (rules; often unstated) for writing in specific academic fields. You may make statements that seem obvious to you, not realizing that your instructors may consider them assertions that must be proved with evidence

of one sort or another. Or you may write more or less formally than teachers expect. Understanding your audience's expectations—by asking outright, by reading materials in your field of study, by trial and error—is important to your success as a college writer.

This point is worth dwelling on. You are probably reading this textbook for a writing course. As a student, you will be expected to produce essays with few or no errors. If as part of your job or among friends and family you correspond using email and texts you may question such standards; after all, many of the messages you get in these contexts are not grammatically perfect. But in a writing class, the instructor needs to see your best work. Whatever the rhetorical situation, your writing must meet the expectations of your audience.

**Identify your audience.** Audiences may be defined as *known*, *multiple*, or *unknown*. *Known audiences* can include people with whom you're familiar as well as people you don't know personally but whose needs and expectations you do know. You yourself are a known, familiar audience, and you write to and for yourself often. Class notes, to-do lists, reminders, and journals are all written primarily for an audience of one: you. For that reason, they are often in shorthand, full of references and code that you alone understand.

Other known, familiar audiences include anyone you actually know—friends, relatives, teachers, classmates—and whose needs and expectations you understand. You can also know what certain readers want and need, even if you've never met them personally, if you write for them within a specific shared context. Such a known audience might include PC gamers who read cheat codes that you have posted on the Internet for beating a game; you don't know those people, but you know roughly what they know about the game and what they need to know, and you know how to write about it in ways they will understand.

You often have to write for *multiple audiences*. Business memos or reports may be written initially for a supervisor, but he or she may pass them along to others. Grant proposals may be reviewed by four to six levels of readers—each, of course, with its own expectations and perspectives.

Even writing for a class might involve multiple audiences: your instructor and your classmates.

*Unknown audiences* can be the most difficult to address since you can't be sure what they know, what they need to know, how they'll react. Such an audience could be your downstairs neighbor, with whom you're chatted occasionally in the laundry room. How will she respond to your letter asking her to sponsor you in an upcoming charity walk? Another unknown audience—perhaps surprisingly—might be many of your instructors, who want—and expect!—you to write in ways that are new to you. While you can benefit from analyzing any audience, you need to think most carefully about those you don't know.

### Thinking about Audience

- **Whom do you want to reach?** To whom are you writing (or speaking)?
- **What is your audience's background—their education and life experiences?** It may be important for you to know, for example, whether your readers attended college, fought in a war, or have young children.
- **What are their interests?** What do they like? What motivates them? What do they care about?
- **Is there any demographic information that you should keep in mind?** Consider whether race, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, occupations, religious beliefs, economic status, and so on should affect what or how you write. For example, writers for *Men's Health*, *InStyle*, and *Out* must consider the particular interests of each magazine's readers.
- **What political circumstances may affect their reading?** What attitudes—opinions, special interests, biases—may affect the way your audience reads your piece? Are your readers conservative, liberal, or middle of the road? Politics may take many other forms as well—retirees on a fixed income may object to increased school taxes, so a letter arguing for such an increase would need to appeal to them differently than would a similar letter sent to parents of young children.

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- What does your audience already know—or believe—about your topic? What do you need to tell them? What is the best way to do so? Those retirees who oppose school taxes already know that taxes are a burden for them; they may need to know why schools are justified in asking for more money every few years. A good way to explain this may be with a bar graph showing how property values benefit from good schools with adequate funding. Consider which **STRATEGIES** will be effective—narrative, comparison, something else?

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- What's your relationship with your audience, and how should it affect your language and tone? Do you know them, or not? Are they friends? Colleagues? Mentors? Adversaries? Strangers? Will they likely share your **VALUES**? In general, you need to write more formally when you're addressing readers you don't know, and you may address friends and colleagues more informally than you would a boss.

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- What does your audience need and expect from you? Your history professor, for example, may need to know how well you can discuss the economy of the late Middle Ages in order to assess your learning; he may expect you to write a carefully reasoned argument, drawing conclusions from various sources, with a readily identifiable thesis in the first paragraph. Your boss, on the other hand, may need an informal email that briefly lists your sales contacts for the day; she may expect that you list the contacts in the order in which you saw them, that you clearly identify each one, and that you briefly say how well each contact went. What **GENRE** is most appropriate?

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- What kind of response do you want? Do you want readers to believe or do something? To accept as valid your information on a topic? To understand why an experience you once had matters to you?
- How can you best appeal to your audience? Is there a particular **MEDIUM** that will best reach them? Are there any **DESIGN** requirements? (Elderly readers may need larger type, for instance.)

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Genres are kinds of writing. Letters, profiles, reports, position papers, poems, blog posts, instructions, parodies—even jokes—are genres. For example, here is the beginning of a **PROFILE** of a mechanic who repairs a specific kind of automobile:

Her business card reads Shirley Barnes, M.D., and she's a doctor, all right—a Metropolitan Doctor. Her passion is the Nash Metropolitan, the little car produced by Austin of England for American Motors between 1954 and 1962. Barnes is a legend among southern California Met lovers—an icon, a beacon, and a font of useful knowledge and freely offered opinions.

A profile offers a written portrait of someone or something that informs and sometimes entertains, often examining its subject from a particular angle—in this case, as a female mechanic who fixes Nash Metropolitans. While the language in this example is informal and lively (“she’s a doctor, all right”), the focus is on the subject, Shirley Barnes, “M.D.” If this same excerpt were presented as a poem, however, the new genre would change our reading:

Her business card reads  
Shirley Barnes, M.D.,  
and she's a doctor, all right  
— a Metropolitan Doctor.  
Her passion is the Nash Metropolitan,  
the little car produced by Austin of England  
for American Motors between 1954 and 1962.  
Barnes is a legend  
among southern California Met lovers  
— an icon,

a beacon,  
and a font of useful knowledge and  
freely offered opinions.

The content hasn't changed, but the different presentation invites us to read not only to learn about Shirley Barnes but also to explore the significance of the words and phrases on each line, to read for deeper meaning and greater appreciation of language. The genre thus determines how we read and how we interpret what we read.

Genres help us write by establishing features for conveying certain kinds of content. They give readers clues about what sort of information they're likely to find and so help them figure out how to read ("This article begins with an abstract, so it's probably a scholarly source" or "Thank goodness! I found the instructions for editing videos on my phone"). At the same time, writers sometimes challenge genre conventions, reshaping them as communicative needs and technologies change. For example, computers have enabled us to add audio and video content to texts that once could appear only on paper.

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**Identify your genre.** Does your writing situation call for a certain **GENRE**? A memo? A report? A proposal? A letter? Academic assignments generally specify the genre ("take a position," "analyze the text"), but if not, see Chapter 21 for help **CHOOSING GENRES** — or ask your instructor.

### Thinking about Genre

- *What is your genre, and how does it affect what content you can or should include?* Objective information? Researched source material? Your own opinions? Personal experience?
- *Does your genre call for any specific **STRUCTURES**?* Profiles, for example, usually include some narration; **LAB REPORTS** often explain a process.
- *Does your genre require a certain organization?* Most **PROPOSALS**, for instance, first identify a problem and then offer a solution. Some genres leave room for choice. Business letters delivering good news might be organized differently than those making sales pitches.

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- *Does your genre affect your tone?* An abstract of a scholarly paper calls for a different **VOICE** than a memoir. Should your words sound serious and scholarly? Brisk and to the point? Objective? Opinionated? Sometimes your genre affects the way you communicate your **VOICE**.
- *Does the genre require formal (or informal) language?* A letter to the mother of a friend asking for a summer job in her bookstore calls for more formal language than does an email to the friend thanking him for the lead.
- *Do you have a choice of medium?* Some genres call for print; others for an electronic medium. Sometimes you have a choice: a résumé, for instance, can be printed to bring to an interview, or it may be emailed. Some teachers want reports turned in on paper; others prefer that they be emailed or posted in the class course management system. If you're not sure what **MEDIUM** you can use, ask.
- *Does your genre have any design requirements?* Some genres call for paragraphs; others require lists. Some require certain kinds of fonts — you wouldn't use **Impact** for a personal narrative, nor would you likely use **Chiller** for an invitation to Grandma's sixty-fifth birthday party. Different genres call for different **DESIGN** elements.

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# 4 Stance

Whenever you write, you have a certain stance, an attitude toward your topic. The way you express that stance affects the way you come across to your audience as a writer and a person. This email from a college student to his father, for example, shows a thoughtful, reasonable stance for a carefully researched argument:

Hi Dad,  
I'll get right to the point: I'd like to buy a car. I saved over \$3500 from working this summer, and I've found three different cars that I can get for under \$3000. That'll leave me \$400 to cover the insurance. I can park in Lot J, over behind Monte Hall, for \$75 for both semesters. And I can earn gas and repair money by upping my hours at the cafeteria. It won't cost you any more, and if I have a car, you won't have to come and pick me up when I want to come home. May I buy it?  
Love,  
Michael

While such a stance can't guarantee that Dad will give permission, it's more likely to produce results than this version:

Hi Dad,  
I'm buying a car. A guy in my Western Civ course has a cool Chevy he wants to get rid of. I've got \$3500 saved from working this summer, it's mine, and I'm going to use it to get some wheels. Mom said you'd blow your top if I did, but I want this car. OK?  
Michael

The writer of the first email respects his reader and offers reasoned arguments and evidence of research to convince him that buying a car is an action that will benefit them both. The writer of the second, by contrast, seems impulsive, ready to buy the first car that comes along, and

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defiant—he's picking a fight. Each email reflects a certain stance that shows the writer as a certain kind of person dealing with a topic in a certain way and establishing a certain relationship with his audience.

**Identify your stance.** What is your attitude toward your topic? Objective? Critical? Curious? Opinionated? Passionate? Indifferent? Your stance may be affected by your relationship to your **AUDIENCE**. How do you want them to see you? As a colleague sharing information? As a good student showing what you can do? As an advocate for a position? Often your stance is affected by your **GENRE**; for example, lab reports require an objective, unemotional stance that emphasizes the content and minimizes the writer's own attitudes. Memoir, by comparison, allows you to reveal your feelings about your topic. Your stance is also affected by your **PURPOSE**, as the two emails about cars show. Your stance in a piece written to entertain will likely differ from the stance you'd adopt to persuade.

You communicate (or downplay) your stance through your tone — through the words you use and other ways your text expresses an attitude toward your subject and audience. For example, in an academic essay you would state your position directly — “the *Real Housewives* series reflects the values of American society today” — a confident, assertive tone. In contrast, using qualifiers like “might” or “I think” can give your writing a wishy-washy, uncertain tone: “I think the *Real Housewives* series might reflect some of the values of American society today.” The following paragraph, from an essay analyzing a text, has a sarcastic tone that might be appropriate for a comment on a blog post, but that isn't right for an academic essay:

In “Just Be Nice,” Stephen M. Carter complains about a boy who wore his pants too low, showing his underwear. Is that really something people should worry about? We have wars raging and terrorism happening every day, and he wants to talk about how inconsiderate it is for someone to wear his pants too low? If by that boy pulling his pants up, the world would be a better place and peace would break out in the Middle East, I'm sure everyone would buy a belt.

This writer clearly thinks Carter's complaint is trivial in comparison with the larger issues of the day, but her sarcastic tone belittles Carter's

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argument instead of answering it with a serious counterargument. Like every other element of writing, your tone must be appropriate for your rhetorical situation.

Just as you likely alter what you say depending on whether you're speaking to a boss, an instructor, a parent, or a good friend, so you need to make similar adjustments as a writer. It's a question of appropriateness: we behave in certain ways in various social situations, and writing is a social situation. You might sign an email to a friend with an x and an o, but in an email to your supervisor you'll likely sign off with a "Many thanks" or "Sincerely." To write well, you need to write with integrity, to say as much as possible what you wish to say; yet you also must understand that in writing, as in speaking, your stance and tone need to suit your purpose, your relationship to your audience, the way in which you wish your audience to perceive you, and your medium. In writing as in other aspects of life, the Golden Rule applies: "Do unto audiences as you would have them do unto you." Address readers respectfully if you want them to respond to your words with respect.

### Thinking about Stance

- **What is your stance, and how does it relate to your purpose for writing?** If you feel strongly about your topic and are writing an argument that tries to persuade your audience to feel the same way, your stance and your **PURPOSE** fit naturally together. But suppose you are writing about the same topic with a different purpose — to demonstrate the depth of your knowledge about the topic, for example, or your ability to consider it in a detached, objective way. You will need to adjust your stance to meet the demands of this different purpose.
- **How should your stance be reflected in your tone?** Can your tone grow directly out of your stance, or do you need to "tone down" your attitude toward the topic or take a different tone altogether? Do you want to be seen as reasonable? Angry? Thoughtful? Gentle? Funny? Ironic? If you're writing about something you want to be seen as taking very

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seriously, be sure that your language and even your font reflect that seriousness. Check your writing for words that reflect the tone you want to convey — and for ones that do not (and revise as necessary).

- **How is your stance likely to be received by your audience?** Your tone and especially the attitude it projects toward your **AUDIENCE** will affect how they react to the content of what you say.
- **Should you openly reveal your stance?** Do you want or need to announce your own perspective on your topic? Will doing so help you reach your audience, or would it be better not to say directly where you're coming from?

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## 5 Media / Design

In its broadest sense, a medium is a go-between: a way for information to be conveyed from one person to another. We communicate through many media, verbal and nonverbal: our bodies (we catch someone's eye, wave, nod); our voices (we whisper, talk, shout, groan); and various technologies, including handwriting, print, telephone, radio, CD, film, and computer.

Each medium has unique characteristics that influence both what and how we communicate. As an example, consider this message: "I haven't told you this before, but I love you." Most of the time, we communicate such a message in person, using the medium of voice (with, presumably, help from eye contact and touch). A phone call will do, though most of us would think it a poor second choice, and a handwritten letter or note would be acceptable, if necessary. Few of us would break such news on a website, with a tweet, or during a radio call-in program.

By contrast, imagine whispering the following sentence in a darkened room: "By the last decades of the nineteenth century, the territorial expansion of the United States had left almost all Indians confined to reservations." That sentence starts a chapter in a history textbook, and it would be strange indeed to whisper it into someone's ear. It is appropriate, however, in the textbook, in print or in an e-book, or on a PowerPoint slide accompanying an oral presentation.

As you can see, we can often choose among various media depending on our purpose and audience. In addition, we can often combine media to create **MULTIMEDIA** texts. And different media allow us to use different ways or modes of expressing meaning, from words to images to sound to hyperlinks, that can be combined into **MULTIMODAL** formats.

No matter the medium or media, a text's design affects the way it is received and understood. A typed letter on official letterhead sends a different message than the same words handwritten on pastel stationery.

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Classic type sends a different message than *flowery italics*. Some genres and media (and audiences) demand **PHOTOS**, **DIAGRAMS**, or color. Some information is easier to explain—and read—in the form of a **PIE CHART** or a **BAR GRAPH** than in the form of a paragraph. Some reports and documents are so long and complex that they need to be divided into sections, which are then best labeled with **HEADINGS**. These are some of the elements to consider when you are thinking about how to design what you write.

**Identify your media and design needs.** Does your writing situation call for a certain medium and design? A printed essay? An oral report with visual aids? A blog? A podcast? Academic assignments often assume a particular medium and design, but if you're unsure about your options or the degree of flexibility you have, check with your instructor.

### Thinking about Media

- **What medium are you using**—print? spoken? electronic? a combination?—and how does it affect the way you will create your text? A printed résumé is usually no more than one page long; a scannable résumé sent via email has no length limits. An oral presentation should contain detailed information; accompanying slides should provide only an outline.
- **How does your medium affect your organization and **STRATEGIES**?** Long paragraphs are fine on paper but don't work well on the web. On presentation slides, phrases or key words work better than sentences. In print, you need to define unfamiliar terms; on the Web, you can sometimes just add a link to a definition found elsewhere.
- **How does your medium affect your language?** Some print documents require a more formal voice than spoken media; email and texting often invite greater informality.
- **How does your medium affect what elements besides words you include?** Should your text include photos, graphics, audio or video files, or links? Do you need slides, handouts, or other visuals to accompany an oral presentation?



## Thinking about Design

- 1 ■ What's the appropriate look for your **TOPIC / SITUATION**? Should your text look serious? Whimsical? Personal? Something else? What design elements will suit your audience, purpose, genre, and medium?
- 591-99 ■ 5-8 ■ What elements need to be designed? Is there any information you would like to highlight by putting it in a box? Are there any key terms that should be boldfaced? Do you need navigation buttons? How should you indicate links?
- 9-11 ■ 17 ■ What font(s) are appropriate to your audience, purpose, genre, and medium?
- Are you including any **VISUALS**? Should you? Will your **AUDIENCE** expect or need any? Is there any information in your text that would be easier to understand as a chart or graph? If you need to include video or audio clips, how should the links be presented?
- Should you include headings? Would they help you organize your materials and help readers follow the text? Does your **CONTEXT** or **MEDIUM** require them?

## Writing in Academic Contexts

In an introductory psychology course, you're assigned to write an essay taking a position on whether genes or environment do more to determine people's intelligence. Your environmental science instructor asks you to research and write a report on the environmental effects of electricity-generating windmills. Your marketing professor requires you to write a proposal, including a multimedia presentation, for a sales campaign. Academic writing serves many purposes: you may write to explore a topic, to explain what's known about it, to outline what others have said about it, to say what you think about it and why — or for various other purposes. Whatever your topic or purpose, academic writing is a way of adding your voice to some larger conversation. This chapter will help you think about some of the key features expected in academic contexts.

## Key Features of Academic Writing

**Evidence that you've carefully considered the subject.** Whether you're writing a personal narrative, a report, or an argument, you need to demonstrate that you've thought seriously about the topic and done any necessary research. You can use a variety of ways to show that you've considered the subject thoughtfully, from citing authoritative sources to incorporating information you learned in class to pointing out connections among ideas.

**A clear, appropriately qualified thesis.** When you write in an academic context, you're expected to state your main point explicitly, often in a thesis statement. MIT student Joanna MacKay states her thesis clearly in her

essay “Organ Sales Will Save Lives”: “Governments should not ban the sale of human organs; they should regulate it.” Often, you’ll need to **QUALIFY** your thesis statement to acknowledge that the subject is complicated and there may be more than one way of seeing it, or exceptions to the generalization you’re making about it. Here, for example, is a qualified thesis, from an essay about whether texting affects writing by Michaela Cullington, a student at Marywood University: “Although some believe that texting has either a positive or negative effect on writing, it in fact seems likely that texting has no significant effect on student writing.” The beginning of the sentence acknowledges other views, and the use of words like *seems likely* and *significant* indicates that Cullington is not making an absolute, unqualified claim that texting has no effect at all.

**A response to what others have said.** Whatever your topic, it is unlikely that you’ll be the first one to write about it. And if, as this chapter assumes, all academic writing is part of a larger conversation, you are in a way adding your own voice to that conversation. One good way of doing that is to present your ideas as a response to what others have said about your topic — to begin by quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing what others have said and then to agree, disagree, or both.

For example, in an essay arguing that the American Dream is alive and well, Brandon King presents the views of two economists who say that because wealth is concentrated in the hands “of a rich minority . . . the American Dream is no longer possible for most Americans.” He then responds by disagreeing, arguing that “the American Dream . . . is based on perception, on the way someone *imagines* how to be successful.”

**Good reasons supported by evidence.** You need to provide good **REASONS** for your thesis and **EVIDENCE** to support those reasons. For example, MacKay offers several reasons why sales of human kidneys should be legalized: there is a surplus of kidneys, the risk to the donor is not great, and legalization would allow the trade in kidneys to be regulated. Evidence to support your reasons sometimes comes from your own experience, but more often from published research and scholarship, research you do yourself, or first-hand accounts by others.

Compared with other kinds of writing, academic writing is generally expected to be more detached and objective and less personal and emotional. You may find *Romeo and Juliet* deeply moving or cry when you watch *Titanic* — but when you write about the play or the film for a class, you must do so using evidence from the text to support your thesis. Similarly, you may find someone’s ideas deeply offensive, but you should respond to them primarily with reason, rather than with emotional appeals or personal attacks.

**Acknowledgment of multiple perspectives.** Debates and arguments in popular media are often framed in “pro/con” terms, a view in which there are only two sides to an issue. Once you begin seriously studying a topic, though, you’re likely to find that there are several sides, and that each of them deserves serious consideration. In your academic writing, you need to represent fairly the range of perspectives on your topic — to explore three, four, or more positions on it as you research and write. King, for instance, looks at the American Dream from several angles: the ways it is defined, the effects of taxes and other government policies on the ability of people to achieve the Dream, the role of education, and more.

**Carefully documented sources.** Clearly acknowledging sources and **DOCUMENTING** them carefully and correctly is a basic requirement of academic writing. When you use the words or ideas of others — including visuals, video, or audio — those sources must be documented both in the text and in a works cited or references list at the end. (If you’re writing something that will appear online, you may also refer readers to your sources by using hyperlinks in the text; check with your instructor first, and ask if you need to include a list of references or works cited.)

**A confident, authoritative STANCE.** Since one of the goals of academic writing is to contribute to a larger conversation, your tone should convey confidence and establish your authority to write about your subject. Ways to achieve such a tone include using active verbs (“X claims” rather than “it seems”), avoiding such phrases as “in my opinion” and “I think,” and

writing in a straightforward, direct style. For example, here is the final paragraph of Cullington's essay on texting and writing:

On the basis of my own research, expert research, and personal observations, I can confidently state that texting is not interfering with students' use of standard written English and has no effect on their writing abilities in general. It is interesting to look at the dynamics of the arguments over these issues. Teachers and parents who claim that they are seeing a decline in the writing abilities of their students and children mainly support the negative-impact argument. Other teachers and researchers suggest that texting provides a way for teens to practice writing in a casual setting and thus helps prepare them to write formally. Experts and students themselves, however, report that they see no effect, positive or negative. Anecdotal experiences should not overshadow the actual evidence.

Cullington's use of simple, declarative sentences ("Other teachers and researchers suggest . . .," "Anecdotal experiences should not overshadow . . .") and her straightforward summary of the arguments surrounding texting, along with her strong, unequivocal ending ("texting is not interfering with students' use of standard written English") lend her writing a confident tone. Her stance sends the message that she's done the research and knows what she's talking about.

**An indication of why your topic matters.** You need to help your readers understand why your topic is worth exploring and why your writing is worth reading. Even if you are writing in response to an assigned topic, you can better make your point and achieve your purpose by showing your readers why your topic is important and why they should care about it. For example, in "Throwing Like a Girl," James Fallows explains why his topic, the differences between the ways men and women throw a baseball, is worth writing about:

The phrase "throwing like a girl" has become an embattled and offensive one. Feminists smart at its implication that to do something "like a girl" is to do it the wrong way. Recently, on the heels of the O. J. Simpson case, a book appeared in which the phrase was used to help explain why male athletes, especially football players, were involved in

so many assaults against women. Having been trained (like most American boys) to dread the accusation of doing anything "like a girl," athletes were said to grow into the assumption that women were valueless, and natural prey.

By explaining that the topic matters because it reflects attitudes about gender that have potentially serious consequences, he gives readers reason to read on about the mechanics of "throwing like a girl."

**Careful attention to correctness.** Whether you're writing something formal or informal, in an essay or an email, you should almost always write in complete sentences, use appropriate capitalization and punctuation, and check that your spelling is correct. In general, academic writing is no place for or texting abbreviations. If you're quoting someone, you can reproduce that person's language exactly, but in your own writing you should try hard to be correct — and always proofread carefully.

### Thinking about an Academic Rhetorical Situation

- **What ~~does~~ does the assignment require?** An essay? If so, is it a narrative, a report, a reflection, an analysis, an argument, or something else? Does the assignment specify the genre, or if not, can you figure out what's required from the verb or other key terms in the assignment wording? If not, do you get to **CHOOSE YOUR GENRE?**
- **What do you see as your instructor's purpose for this assignment?** To have you demonstrate learning of some kind? Show your understanding of course material? Discuss ideas, concepts, or facts? Explore ideas and look for connections among them? Have you been given a description of what your writing should include?
- **What is your ~~purpose~~ as the writer, apart from fulfilling your instructor's expectations?** To persuade your audience to do or believe something? To inform them about something and help them understand it? To play with ideas and see where they lead?

- 5-8 ■ **Who is your AUDIENCE?** Your instructor? your classmates? others? How much does the audience know about the topic? Are they in an academic field with particular conventions you need to follow?
- 12-15 ■ **How can you convey a confident, authoritative STANCE?** By showing that you understand the larger context of your topic? By showing confidence in what you say? By stating your claims forthrightly and clearly? By adopting a tone appropriate for your genre?
- 16-18 ■ **What MEDIA are available, permitted, and appropriate? Are any required?** Will you present your work as a paper document? As a digital text? As an oral presentation? Can you — and should you — use photos, drawings, charts, graphs, or slides or embed audio or video files?
- 16-18 ■ **What DESIGN issues need to be considered?** Should you assume that your written text should follow MLA or APA formatting guidelines? Do you need to include any visual or audio elements? How much freedom do you have to design your work?

# part 2

## Genres

When we make a shopping list, we automatically write each item we need in a single column. When we email a friend, we begin with a salutation: “Hi, Brian.” Whether we are writing a letter, a résumé, a lab report, or a proposal, we know generally what it should contain and what it should look like because we are familiar with each of those genres.

Genres are kinds of writing, and texts in any given genre share goals and features—a proposal, for instance, generally starts out by identifying a problem and then suggests a certain solution. The chapters in this part provide guidelines for writing in thirteen common academic genres. First come detailed chapters on four genres often assigned in writing classes: **INTERVIEWS**, **NARRATIVES**, **essays** **ANALYZING TEXTS**, **THEORIES**, and **ARGUMENTS**, followed by brief chapters on **NINE OTHER GENRES** and two on **WRITING and CHOOSING GENRES**.