Chapter 23. Exercises for Analyzing Audience and Genre

In this Chapter

We can think about "exercises" two ways, as skill-building and as simple movement. We know that reflective writers need deliberate practice to improve: after all, writing doesn't happen with just one big swoop of words landing on a page, but with deliberate moves and approaches assembled over time. Practicing writing shares many characteristics with other kinds of practice: like shooting free throws, drawing faces, piping frosting, calculating cosines, or identifying cells, writing practice requires guidance, focus, repetition, and connection to a larger goal. Writers gain confidence and insight when we practice particular skills, either skills we most need for our work at the moment or skills we struggle with most.

Solve writing problems reflectively

As reflective writers, we also know that when we're stuck, we don't have "writer's block"—instead, we just have a problem we need to figure out. The exercises in this section are designed to support that problem-solving process. They can help writers DEAL with being stuck, by

- **D**efining a problem,
- **E**xploring some options for addressing it,
- **A**cting by trying out a new approach for 20 minutes or so, and
- **L**earning how to apply that new idea where it's helpful.

When we take deliberate, reflective, writing-focused action (rather than checking our messages or staring at the cursor blinking on the screen), we can lower our stress, gain a fresh perspective or increased energy, and move forward to new and productive insights.

Avoid high expectations

Practice may "make perfect," but practice work should never strive to *be* perfect. When you exercise as a writer, try to ignore small errors in word choice or punctuation, and try not to worry about whether you're getting the "right" answers. Just keep writing answers.

Practice persistence

You need to persist in a single exercise long enough to prompt your brain to release or create ideas you weren't aware you had. You might set a timer, and work as hard as you can for 20 or 30 minutes. You also need to persist across time, whether you repeat the same exercise multiple times or engage in different exercises at multiple points during a writing project.

Whether you use these exercises to strengthen your skills or to build more flexible processes, you can improve your current project and gain more fluency as a writer overall.

23.1 Advertisement Analysis

Define your goal

Use this exercise to recognize common visual argument strategies that you could adapt for your writing.

Background

For more information on layout and design principles like *Z-line* and *alignment*, see Chapter 8, Designing Across Modalities.

Take action

Set the context: Locate 2 advertisements or posters. In a few sentences, describe the target audience of each advertisement or poster. What are the top two or three clues

you have that support your audience analysis? Also identify what the purpose of the advertisement is: is it only to persuade readers to make a purchase, or also to create an emotion, change a long-term behavior, or produce a line of thinking?

Begin the analysis: Using paragraphs, lists, or a two-column log, note details for each advertisement that contribute to its persuasive power. You might address some of these features:

- **Importance**: Use the Z-line, the size and color of objects, and comparison of foreground and background objects to identify what the authors want readers to pay the most and least attention to.
- **CRAP**: Identify how the authors use contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity (link) to organize and emphasize information.
- **Alternatives and absences**: Identify key words, objects, or people, and discuss how even a slight change (in diction, size, or age, for instance) would alter the argument; also identify what information, objects, or (categories of) people are not featured, and discuss how their absence affects the argument.
- **Appeals**: Identify how the ads appeal not just to logical reasoning but to common values (*ethos*) and to the desires or fears (*pathos*) of readers.
- **Space and abstraction**: Identify how the authors use empty or unspecified space, abstract design elements, or seemingly unrelated elements (kittens in a juice ad) to guide readers' responses or emphasize their message.

Reflect to learn and connect

Conclude by writing a sentence or two that identify persuasive strategies you might use in your own current writing project.

*Explore related exercises*

Diction Flexer, Elevator Speech, Scenarios

23.2 Audience Profile

Define your goal

Use this exercise to create a clearer mental image of a primary audience, so you can write directly to them.

Background

Writers are usually much more effective when writing to known, specific readers than to broad, general audiences. To challenge yourself, you want to imagine a reader who is
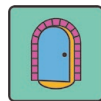
- invested in the issue
- educated enough to keep up with you in a debate, and
- skeptical about anything you propose.

Take action

See them: With those characteristics in mind, write a one-paragraph profile of a single important reader (besides your instructor) for your project: give them a name, hometown, and profession. Explain why this reader has a stake in this issue: why or how will it affect them? Then write a few sentences showing their point of view about the topic: what do they already know about it, and what do they hope or fear will happen? what are the main questions or objections they would raise? If they were writing a letter, blog, or social media post about it, what would it say? what picture or graph would be included?

Really see them: Take care as you write to avoid stereotyping or badmouthing this reader. Check on your assumptions: are you imagining this reader as having demographic data similar to yours (age, race/ethnicity, sexuality, family, schooling, religion, income)? If so, is that a likely case for your audience, or just your usual habit? If this reader has a different identity or context from you, do you have experience or evidence that is helping you consider their perspective, or should you do some research to find out more about their needs or expectations? *Add one more sentence*: What's one way that this reader might surprise you with their concerns or priorities?

Tell them: When you have your profile written, start a second paragraph as a letter to your reader: Dear X. In informal daily language, try to explain: what do you think are the two or three most important things you want them to learn about this issue? why/how will they benefit from paying attention to your views?

Reflect to learn and connect

Conclude with a sentence about writing to this audience: how might your arguments, evidence, genre, or organization change in order to best connect with them?
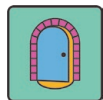
Explore related exercises

Believing/Doubting, Dialogue, Evidence Shopping List

23.3 Audience/Stakeholder Mapping

Define your goal

Use this exercise to understand the competing needs of multiple audiences.

Background

While basic documents like a memo or report may have a one-person or homogeneous one-organization audience, more public or persuasive documents may need to address multiple groups or a single group that contains members with diverse perspectives. You do not have to become a politician who promises everything to everybody, but you may benefit from mapping out audience areas of knowledge and concern to better address competing and overlapping needs.

Take action

Begin by generating a list of audience members you would like to reach, by person, type, or group names. If there aren't official names or people, designate "people who support X strongly" or "people who have studied Y for years" or "newcomers to Boston" as well as groups who aren't those people. Then create either a knowledge map or a concerns map, depending on whether you are focused on gathering information or structuring your arguments.

Create a knowledge map: To help you decide how much information or analysis to provide, map the knowledge or understanding of these audiences. Add each group's name to your page with a short note: "Knows A but not B" or "Understands at a high level" or "Needs a lot of background info." Try to place audiences with similar understandings near one another on the page. If you wish, you can add circles around each audience's name that might overlap (like a Venn diagram) to show the degree that some audiences have similar knowledge backgrounds. You can also add other map features such as roads, mountain ranges, or deep crevasses to help you visualize connections or separations between audience groups. You might want to label any overlaps or connecting roads so you can see key information that several audiences want addressed: "Confusion about legal issues."

Create a concerns map: To help you decide how best to persuade these audiences, map the concerns or resistances that each one has. (This is a separate map from the knowledge map.) Add each group's name to your page with a short note: "Believes A but doubts B" or "Highly concerned about X" or "Needs to be motivated to act." Try to place audiences with similar concerns near one another on the page. If you wish, you can add circles around each audience's name that might overlap (like a Venn diagram) to show the degree that some audiences have similar levels of resistance or worry. You can also add other map features such as roads, mountain ranges, or deep crevasses to help you visualize connections or separations between audience groups. You might want to label any overlaps or connecting roads so you can see key points that several audiences want addressed: "Concerns about costs."

Reflect to learn and connect

When you have completed your map, spend a few minutes writing about the landscape: which of these individuals or groups do you see as primary and secondary audiences, and which will you choose not to focus your attention on at this time (though of course they may encounter your document)? What common issues will you want to emphasize to help all audiences connect better with your main goals? At what points in your text could you specifically address the needs of secondary audiences—briefly, perhaps—while showing that those ideas are connected to the needs of the primary audience?

Explore related exercises

Counterargument Generator, Off on a Rant, Seven Generations

23.4 Audience Switch

Define your goal

Use this exercise to explore multiple perspectives about an issue and understand what knowledge must be gained and shared.

Take action

Freewrite option: Identify and describe a target audience member (age, gender, region, profession, level of agreement on the issue: see *audience profile* above) and write for 5-10 minutes to explain a key concept or convince the audience of an important argument. Keep this reader's specific interests and questions in mind, and try to engage their curiosity and respond to their objections. Then describe a different reader: one who has more knowledge or power (or less), one who is much younger or is less familiar with the situation, or one who is more skeptical or more in agreement, and write for 5-10 minutes to explain or argue the same point to that person. At the end, write a few sentences to yourself: what kinds of adaptations did you make? how would a change in audience like that affect your research or writing strategies for the whole project? what kind of target audience would you be most motivated, or most challenged, to use for this project?

Chart option: Identify and describe at least three different target audience members (age, gender, region, profession, level of agreement on the issue: see *audience profile* above) for your project, and use them to complete a chart like the one below.

	Reader 1 =	Reader 2 =	Reader 3 =
Background information I must provide			
Two most relevant aspects for this reader			

	Reader 1 =	Reader 2 =	Reader 3 =
A question this reader is likely to ask			
This reader's main worry or objection			
Kind of evidence or approach that will impress this reader			
Sample sentence showing level of knowledge and diction appropriate for this reader			

Reflect to learn and connect

At the end, write a few sentences to yourself: how would a change in audience like these affect your research or writing strategies for the whole project? what kind of target audience would you be most motivated, or most challenged, to use for this project?

Explore related exercises

Evidence Garden, Inner Three-Year-Old, Seven Generations

23.5 Elevator Speech

Define your goal

Use this exercise to identify the core arguments or ideas and the strongest supporting evidence of your project, and to imagine the response of a key audience member in order to focus your research and writing.

Background

In an "elevator speech" scenario, you suddenly find yourself in an elevator with a Very Important Person related to your project: a president or high-level manager of your company, a powerful politician who sits on a relevant committee, a celebrity with an interest in this cause and a lot of money to donate. Even if the building is tall and the elevator is slow, you may have only sixty to ninety seconds to introduce yourself and pitch your idea, so you need to focus on the most important points.

Take action

Draft: Very quickly (as if you've just spotted the person waiting for the elevator and don't have much time to get ready) write a draft of an elevator speech, no more than 200 words. Start with two short introductory sentences. Introduce the audience as if you already knew they were connected to your issue: "Hello,

Senator Brown, I know you're interested in _____." Introduce yourself: "My name is ____, and I'm working on a project that supports/argues _____ , and I/we could use your support." Explain exactly what this person could do to support your cause, and give the main specific reasons they would want to do so. (Hint: this paragraph and the one before it equal about 200 words: it's not much space!)

Partner option: Present your speech to a partner in a live setting, with all your best persuasive eye-contact and sincerity of tone. As your partner gives you their speech, listen in the mindset of the specified audience: what persuades you? what questions do you have? After the speech, ask skeptical questions: after all, you don't lend your support to just anybody who traps you in an elevator on a Tuesday morning. Pause after each speech for the speaker to make notes about what worked well and what needed improvement.

Link it back: If you had a partner ask you questions, consider whether you need and have answers to them. If not, consider your speech from your audience's point of view, and write down two or three likely questions that they would need you to answer.

Reflect to learn and connect

Now go back to your notes or your draft: how can you use your elevator speech language early and often to focus your reader's attention on key elements of your argument? How does having a specific person in mind as an audience help you see what evidence you want to focus on and where you need more or less explanation?

Explore related exercises

Counterargument Generator, Evidence Shopping List, Used to Think / Now I Think

23.6 Expert/Novice Exploration

Define your goal

Use this exercise to explore strategies for revising/adapting a text to meet the needs of a more or less well-informed audience.

Background

It can be easy to get into the habit of writing either for "everyone" or writing for someone whose understanding of an issue is approximately the same as your own. By experimenting with text changes that specifically address the needs of

different readers, you can gain more insight into your own goals and more consistency with your approach.

Take action

Choose a paragraph from your current document, and copy it into your writing space. Unless this paragraph includes your overall argument, add a sentence or two that state your main focus or argument for this document. Then choose whether you want to make it appeal more to newcomers or experienced readers.

Modify for novice readers: Imagine that you are revising this document so that beginners can read it easily: these readers can be significantly younger, less experienced in the specific field or issue, and/or less motivated than the audience you have generally been imagining. Give your novice reader a name to help keep them clear in your mind. Remember that these readers might get frustrated easily in trying to read your document. Use the revision levels below to make at least six changes to your paragraph to help those readers connect and understand: experiment with changes at each level of revision.

Modify for expert readers: Imagine that you are revising this document so that advanced readers will find it engaging and illuminating: these readers can be significantly older than you were thinking; they might be experts in this field or in this issue, and/or might be highly motivated by and involved with the arguments. Give your expert reader a name (and maybe a job or professional title) to help keep them clear in your mind. Remember that these readers might expect you to sound credible and engage them with precise, complex ideas. Use the revision levels below to make at least six changes to your paragraph to help those readers engage and trust your judgment: experiment with changes at each level of revision.

Explore revision levels: Make additions, deletions, or modifications in each category. In some cases, you'll be creating whole new sentences; in others, you can just change a few words. If you need to make something up—a fact, a pretend source, a conclusion—you can do so in order to get the feel of the change (but star * any new sentence that's fictional so you remember!).

- **Information and key concepts**: Identify what your audience already knows or doesn't know, and decide what kind of information you need to add, cut, or adapt. You might want to include more background, more steps, or simplified concepts for your novice readers; you may need to include more exact or detailed information, more credible sources, or more precise measurements or examples, for advanced readers.
- **Analysis and argument**: Identify how committed your readers are to completely understanding this issue/idea. Will novice readers get bored if you go too in-depth or provide too many examples? Do experts need you

to dig deep and include more conclusions about small changes, gray areas, or sub-issues that are relevant to the conversations in the field?

- **Diction and word choice**: Identify key sentences in your paragraph (including ones you may already have revised) and look for ways to modify key words or phrases to meet your readers' expectations. (If you focus on changing important phrases only, you will be less likely to adopt an insincere tone that either condescends to beginners or sounds pretentious to advanced readers.) You might want to use less or more field-specific terminology ("jargon"); you might want to include more or less "filler" language to help invite and reassure readers.

Reflect to learn and connect

When you're finished, write yourself a note: what was hard or easy about the changes you made, and which kind of change(s) do you think you should try to do more of as you revise in order to make your document match your readers' needs?

Explore related exercises

<u>Boil Down</u>, <u>Gray-Area Finder</u>, <u>Letter to Kermit</u>

23.7 Genre Ethnography

Define your goal

Use this exercise to understand some of the key expectations and variations of the genre in which you plan to write.

Background

An ethnographer usually observes a person or group of people to determine how their behaviors are affected by (and contribute to) their culture. Similarly, you can examine some sample documents to determine how their features are determined by and vary from the expectations of their genre.

Take action

Collect three sample documents in or close to the genre in which you are going to compose. If you can't find exactly what you need—a letter to a senator or a school assembly video (though you might be amazed what you can find online)—come close: find a sample of a business letter or short argumentative policy statement, or find a video of another presentation to a similar audience.

Complete 4-5 rows of a log like the one below. Try to include at least two thoughtful sentences of explanation for each box about a document you found: how does that document respond to the criterion, and what evidence in the document

(quote a short phrase if you'd like) supports your conclusion? If two sample documents are exactly the same for one criterion, you can say so, but try to be aware of even small differences that can reveal where writers have "wiggle room" to connect with readers. Also be as specific as you can in describing your plans for your own composing: what information, strategies, or design elements will help you achieve your goals?

|	Sample Doc 1=	Sample Doc 2=	Sample Doc 3=	Something I could do to make my document effective
Who uses this genre, and where?				
How do they use this genre, and why?				
What is this genre usually about or focused on?				
How is this genre usually organized or designed?				
What approach(es) or stance(es) does this genre take toward the reader?				
What diction, style, tone, visuals, or other elements characterize this genre?				

Reflect to learn and connect

When you're done, write yourself a few reminder notes: what patterns and expectations in this genre seem the most consistent or even rigid? where is there the most room for variation?

Explore related exercises

Audience Profile, Diction Flexer, Out on a Limb

23.8 Genre Switch

Define your goal
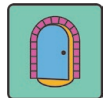
Use this exercise to use an alternate genre as a lens through which to gain a new perspective on your topic area or issue, and/or to experiment with how a new genre might better suit your or your readers' needs.

Take action

Short/exploratory version: Choose a highly structured, even stereotyped or exaggerated genre that you know well and that is quite unlike the academic or professional genre you are currently using. You might consider genres like haiku or limerick poetry, beverage commercials, recipes, detective TV shows, love songs, manga comics, wedding announcements, sports play-by-play calls, Tweets or status updates, lab reports, cereal boxes, or whatever the latest video meme is. Take a few minutes to write down the main expectations of that genre: tone, length, content, and emphasis. Then write the core idea(s) of your current project into (the start of) a text in that new genre. Don't worry about getting the language or design exactly right: try to mimic the feel and perspective of the genre.

Long/transformative version: Choose an alternate genre you know that might also work for the goals and readers of your current document. You might consider moving to a shorter genre (memo, cover blurb, news story, white paper), a multimodal genre (brochure, poster, campaign speech), or an online genre (webpage, animation, video). Take a few minutes to write down a description of a target audience and their main expectations for that genre: tone, length, content, and emphasis. You might sketch an overview: what parts of your current work would you keep, modify, emphasize, or delete as you moved to this new genre? Then write the core idea(s) of your current project into (the start of) a text in the new genre. Don't worry about getting the language or design exactly right, but do try to make your core ideas come alive for your audience: how will you have the greatest impact?

Reflect to learn and connect

When you're done, write for a few minutes about what you noticed: how is the new genre more and/or less effective at meeting your and your readers' needs? If you stay with your current genre and project, how might you use approaches from the alternate genre to improve it?

Explore related exercises

Add/Move/Change/Delete, Best and Better, Counterargument Generator

23.9 Genre Triple Log

Define your goal

Use this exercise to explore how a new genre might increase and/or limit your ability to communicate with your readers.

Take action

Anchor: Begin by briefly describing your current goal or key argument for your writing project. Also describe your target audience: what do they know and need to know, how much time and interest do they have in this issue, what resistances might they have?

Explore: Now list at least 10 different genres you might possibly be able to use to communicate your ideas to this audience. Don't forget to consider professional genres (memo, report), informal genres (tweet, text), and specialized genres (recipe, horror movie script).

Compare: Using a list—or a chart like the one below—explore three of those genres a little further. What are three reasons that each genre might possibly be effective at achieving your goals? What are three reasons that the genre might not be your best choice? Stretch your brain and try to give different reasons as you move from one section of the log to another.

Genre 1	Three reasons it could work	Three reasons it might not work
Genre 2	Three reasons it could work	Three reasons it might not work
Genre 3	Three reasons it could work	Three reasons it might not work

Reflect to learn and connect

Conclude by writing yourself a note: List two or three of your reasons (for or against) that you think are most important to consider for choosing the genre of this project. Of your three genres, which one might best serve your and your audience's needs right now, and why?

Explore related exercises

Genre Ethnography, Seven Generations, Three Cubes