

Writing in Context

Writing instructors help students...

Develop arguments in multiple genres that are relevant to students and to the audiences to which they're addressed.

Arguments are claims or points of view and occur in all types of writing; they develop and support the writer's ideas while showing understanding and respect for the ideas of others. The primary purpose of an argument in an academic context is to share the writer's inquiry into a topic, issue, or controversy with an audience.

Genre is a "kind" of writing that defines itself through the demonstration of particular conventions, forms, and/or features. Many people think of literary genres like romance, science fiction, or autobiography when they encounter the term, but academic essays, cover letters, personal statements, and lab reports are all examples of different genres of writing. When writers understand the expectations and common features of a genre of writing, they are better prepared to meet or exceed the expectations of their audience with their writing.

Audience refers to the real and imagined readers for a piece of writing. Writing is a social act, which means that when we write, we are performing an action that will be received and reviewed by someone else. Successful writers are consistently able to understand and anticipate what the audience expects from their writing and then draft and revise accordingly. Writers can develop their ability to meet audience expectations by reading other texts critically and reflectively, by thinking carefully about organization and structure while they draft, and by attending to tone, style, and voice in their writing process.

Why is this objective important? For students, for the program?

Students should write about topics they care about and write about what they believe to be true – all while considering the expectations, perspectives, and beliefs of their audience. By doing so, students can help to improve the credibility and effectiveness of their writing. The practice of developing arguments with a specific audience in mind is critical to transferring their writing skills across disciplines and into new contexts beyond UO.

Example Learning Activities:

Writing for a new audience:

Consider how different audiences bring different expectations to writing/videos/presentations on the same topic when the context and medium change.

Activity: In class, share three different examples of writers and/or creators presenting arguments or analysis on the same topic, but for different mediums. For example, you might select a movie review from a national newspaper or magazine, a YouTube review of the same movie, and a Facebook or social media post on that movie. As you share the examples, ask students to consider what assumptions each writer/creator is making about what their audience expects from them. What's their tone like? What assumptions are they making? What about their word choice? Ask students to draw specific examples (after conferring in small groups) of where they see the writer/creator making choices based on their different audiences. Follow this activity up with an in-class writing exercise where you ask students to briefly write a paragraph about the same topic, but for two different types of audiences. Ask students to share these in small groups, and be sure they explain who the different audiences are and where those different conceptions influence the writer's choices.