



Graduate Online Writing Studio

Considering the Reader

When writing in an academic context, it is common to assume that the only audience for the paper is your instructor. If your assignment does not specify an audience, you should consider each writing assignment as an opportunity to speak to professionals in your field of study and participate in an academic conversation to broaden and deepen the scholarship in your field. With that lens in mind, you should think of the audience or reader as an individual in your field of study. There are steps that you can take as a writer to consider your audience that can help your reader navigate through your ideas and follow the organization of your paper more effectively. By asking yourself these questions as you write, you can build a stronger and more comprehensive paper.

What does the reader not know that they need to know to understand what I am saying?

By the time you get to the writing process, you have likely conducted research on your topic, and while you may not consider yourself an expert on the topic, you likely know more than the average reader. You should consider that the reader may not know all that you know about the topic and provide them with the necessary background information in the paper that they need to understand what you are saying and where you are coming from.

Are the terms I am using familiar to the reader, or do they need to be defined?

While it is always a good idea to avoid using too much jargon in your writing as it can be unclear to the reader, sometimes it is necessary to use technical or specific terminology to discuss a topic in the most comprehensive way possible. Because the reader may not be familiar with these terms and jargon, defining uncommon terminology is an essential part of being considerate to your reader. Once you have defined or explained a term once in your paper, you can use the term confidently throughout the rest of the paper knowing that the reader will not be thrown off by your use of technical jargon.

Can my reader easily navigate the organization of my paper?

As the writer, you know what you are trying to say and how you are trying to say it, but the reader may lose track of where you are going if you do not provide enough connective tissue and organization to guide them through the paper. Providing strong transitions and organizational elements like topic sentences and closing statements in your paragraphs can help provide guidance to your reader as they navigate the paper. You also want to make it clear to the reader how any outside information you bring into the paper relates to your topic or overall argument so that they see the relevance of that information and how it supports your points.

Is the reader likely to agree or disagree with me?

When writing an argumentative or persuasive paper, you want to consider whether the reader is likely to be on your side or not. If you are arguing something that is widely accepted in your field, your reader is likely to agree, so you can emphasize your points more easily and be less forceful with your argument. However, if you are arguing for something that is widely accepted, you may need to ask yourself whether you are bringing anything original to the scholarship or whether you are just retreading an argument that has already been made. If the latter, you may consider looking for a new avenue to pursue so that your paper presents an original thesis. If you are arguing something that is less popular or commonly accepted or arguing against convention, you may need to adjust your argument style to be more persuasive or avoid putting your reader off.

Am I making my paper interesting to the reader?

The reader comes into your paper looking for new and compelling information about your topic. As stated above, you want to present something original to the reader rather than something they have heard before or could get from another source so that you do not lose their interest. You also want to present the information in your paper in an interesting way to keep the reader's attention. Selecting a topic that interests you might result in a more interesting read for your audience. If you are interested in your topic, you are more likely to make your reader feel invested in what you are writing about. Varying your sentence structure can also keep your readers engaged because it can keep them on their toes and keep your writing from sounding monotonous or predictable. One of the best ways to make anything you write more interesting and impactful for the reader is to show them why it is relevant to them. If what you are saying will impact the reader or can inform their knowledge of your topic or field in a relevant way, they are more likely to stay engaged as you progress through the paper.

What is the reader going to do with the information they are getting from my paper?

Often the last thing you do in your paper is conclude by telling the reader why the information in the paper matters. If you have been considerate of your reader throughout the paper, you should not have to worry about explaining why the topic is relevant to them, but you still want to consider what they are going to do with the information after they leave the paper as you think about how to conclude. Is the reader going to act based on the argument you have presented, and if so, what will that action look like? You may want to call them to action as you close your paper, but you want to be specific about the best action moving forward with the issue or topic. Are there things your reader could do to further your research and dive even deeper into the topic? As a writer engaged in the topic, you may want to present other areas or avenues that could be considered for future research in order to guide future scholars to engage in the topic and expand the knowledge base of the field.