Knowing Your Audience:
How Audience Awareness Makes Better Writing

Introduction: Today we are going to investigate how audience (or rhetorical) awareness will help with your research and writing processes.

Large Group Discussion (10-15 minutes)
- Take a few minutes to list the audiences you consider in your daily writing tasks (includes texts, emails, class assignments...any form of writing to communicate). These are all different rhetorical situations.
- How do you adjust your tone to address the different audiences you listed? Discuss this with a partner and be ready to report out to the group. (PPT)

Tone: A writer’s attitude toward the subject and the audience. For example, it is helpful to think about whether your tone should be formal, semi-formal, or informal in college writing. Generally, academic writers use specialized language to their discipline and avoid language that sounds too informal/conversational. (PPT)

- Share responses.
- Mini Lesson: In college writing, your audience members are usually your professors and your peers. However, you should always add a “naive reader” to that audience. Anyone who picks up your paper should be able to understand your points without knowing the assignment prompt or the context of the class. The naive reader helps ensure that you are explaining ideas clearly and forming skills that will transfer to other audiences and assignments. You might want to submit your paper to a conference someday where you will have a much larger audience.

The genre of writing dictates the appropriate tone. Many formal writing assignments will require you to make a claim and support that claim with evidence. Some assignments will ask you to be more expressive or reflective, and you can use a slightly more informal tone.

No matter what the tone is, you will be most effective if you use language that communicates respect for your diverse audience of readers. For example, obviously swearing is rarely appropriate in college writing assignments. Keep in mind that being formal does not mean you have to erase your voice. The reader wants your perspective. Passion for your subject and emotional appeals can be powerful in both formal and informal writing. (PPT key phrases)

- Introduce concepts of ethos/pathos/logos (PPT triangle visual). Write this mnemonic device on the board for remembering meanings: Ethos=Ethics, Pathos=Sympathy, Logos=Logic.

Activity (35-45 minutes): Formal Email (Handouts detailing prompts and handouts on email etiquette and colloquialisms)

Option 1:

Scenario: Most of us have had a bad experience with group work at some point in our educational journey. Imagine you are doing a group writing assignment and each group member is responsible for writing a different section. Everyone has finished except for one group member. The paper is due in two days, and you are worried that your paper will receive a poor overall grade because now you cannot
review the whole paper as a group before submitting. Write an email addressed to Dr. Frizzle explaining your situation and finding out how she will be grading the assignment. Make a persuasive argument using formal language and incorporating at least one of the following: ethos, pathos, logos. Draw from your own experiences and feel free to invent details that would help make your case.

Tip: If the teacher has a Professor title, you can assume they have a doctoral degree. If the teacher has an Instructor title, it is safer to address them as Mr./Ms. _______ (Last Name).

Option 2:

Scenario: Think about one of your favorite places in Louisville, and imagine that the owners/proprietors have decided to sell the space and it will now be destroyed and a manufacturing plant will be built in its place. Write the owner an email to try to persuade them to change their mind. Be sure to use at least one of the rhetorical methods we discussed: ethos, pathos, logos. You have never met the owner, so the tone needs to be formal and polite.

- Swap papers with a partner and read their email aloud. Answer the following (10-15 minutes):
  1. Tell the writer what you liked about the email. Which parts are the most persuasive?
  2. Point to areas where the tone could be more formal.
  3. Identify uses of ethos, pathos, and logos in your partner’s email and see if it matches with that they intended to communicate. Discuss why each of you chose ethos/pathos/logos for this situation. Which appeal(s) are most effective in this situation, in your opinion?
- Report Out: One member from each group shares something interesting they discovered in their conversation. (10 minutes)
- Revise (10 minutes): Write a second draft considering the feedback you have received.
- Share rewrites with same partner (5-10 minutes): tell your partner where you noticed changes that made the email more persuasive or formal.
- Submit first and second drafts.

Debrief (5 minutes): What are your take-aways from this workshop? Roses and thorns (hand out index cards). On the rose side list two of your takeaways from today, and on the thorns side list one or two questions you have.