



# **TECHNICAL WRITING**

## **CHAPTER 3: DEFINING AUDIENCES**

**Instructors:**  
**Dr. Yazan Al-Zain**  
**Eng. Lamees Al-Durgham**  
**Eng. Raghad Hemeimat**  
**Eng. Rawan Tarawneh**

# HOW MUCH DOES YOUR AUDIENCE KNOW ABOUT THE TOPIC

- Every audience has a knowledge level:
  - The amount they know about the subject matter of the document.
  - The level ranges from expert to nonexpert.
- An expert audience understands the basic terminology, facts, concepts and implications associated with the topic.
- A nonexpert audience is intelligent but is not well informed about the topic.

Knowing how much the audience knows will help you choose which information to present and in what depth to explain it

# HOW MUCH DOES YOUR AUDIENCE KNOW ABOUT THE TOPIC – *FINDING OUT WHAT YOUR AUDIENCE KNOWS*

- Discovering what the audience knows is a key activity for any writer. You can employ several strategies to estimate an audience's level of knowledge:
  - Ask them before you write.
  - Ask them after you write.
  - Ask someone else.
  - Consider the audience's position.
  - Consider prior contacts.



# HOW MUCH DOES YOUR AUDIENCE KNOW ABOUT THE TOPIC – *ADAPTING TO YOUR AUDIENCE'S KNOWLEDGE LEVEL*

- Done by building on their previous schemata (concepts they have formed from previous experiences).
  - Basic principle: *add to what the audience knows, and do not belabor what they already know.*
  - If the audience knows a term or concept (has a schema for it), simply present it.
  - If not (they have no schema), you must help them grasp it and add it to their schemata.

Read examples of pages 62 and 63



# WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE'S ROLE IN THE SITUATION

- Audience members are like actors, each has a part to play using the document as a script.
- They perform actions after receiving the information in your document.
  - Those who take the most active roles are users and decision makers.
  - Users: need a document that gives specific instructions for physically carrying out a process.
  - Decision makers: need documents they can use to come to an informed decision.



# WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE'S ROLE IN THE SITUATION

- A good writer changes a document to accommodate different audience roles.
- To determine your audience's role, ask these questions:
  - What is the audience's need? Why is the reader concerned with the content of the document?
  - What is the audience's task? What will the reader do after reading the document?

Consider 2 audiences: operator of a machine and their department managers



# WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE'S ROLE IN THE SITUATION

- A good writer changes a document to accommodate different audience roles.
- To determine your audience's role, ask these questions:
  - What is the audience's need? Why is the reader concerned with the content of the document?
  - What is the audience's task? What will the reader do after reading the document?

Consider 2 audiences: operator of a machine and their department managers



# WHAT ARE THE AUDIENCE'S COMMUNITY ATTITUDES?

- They are the expectations a reader has when he or she reads a document.
  - They arise from:
    - The readers role in the community.
    - The social situations.
    - The feelings about the message and the sender
- These attitudes powerfully affect the way readers read.





# WHAT ARE THE AUDIENCE'S COMMUNITY ATTITUDES?

- As a writer, you must learn to assess the following factors:
  - What consequences will arise from this idea.
  - What is the history of the idea.
  - How much power does the reader have.
  - How formal is the situation.
  - How does the reader feel about the subject and the sender.
  - What form does the reader expect.



# WHAT ARE THE AUDIENCE'S COMMUNITY ATTITUDES? – *WHAT CONSEQUENCES WILL ARISE FROM THIS IDEA?*

- *Consequences*: the effects of one's actions on the organization.
  - If the effect of your suggestion would be to violate an Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA) standard:
    - Your suggestion will be turned down.
  - If the effect would be to make profit:
    - The idea will probably be accepted.



# WHAT ARE THE AUDIENCE'S COMMUNITY ATTITUDES? – *WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE IDEA?*

- *History*: the situation prior to your writing.
  - You need to show the you understand that situation:
    - Otherwise, you will be dismissed as someone who does not understand the implications of what you are saying.
  - If your suggestion to change a procedure indicates that you do not know that a similar change failed several years ago:
    - Your suggestion will probably be rejected.



# WHAT ARE THE AUDIENCE'S COMMUNITY ATTITUDES? – *HOW MUCH POWER DOES THE READER HAVE?*

- *Power*: the supervisory relationship of the author and reader.
  - Supervisors have more power:
    - Orders flow from supervisors to subordinates, and suggestions move the reverse.
  - The more powerful the reader:
    - The less likely the document is to give orders.
    - And the more likely it is to make suggestions.



## WHAT ARE THE AUDIENCE'S COMMUNITY ATTITUDES? – *HOW FORMAL IS THE SITUATION?*

- *Formality*: the degree of impersonality in the document.
  - In many situations:
    - You are expected to act in an official capacity, rather than as a personality.
  - Generally:
    - The more formal the situation, the more impersonal the document.



# WHAT ARE THE AUDIENCE'S COMMUNITY ATTITUDES? – *HOW DOES THE READER FEEL ABOUT THE SUBJECT AND THE SENDER?*

- The reader's feelings can be described as positively inclined, neutral, or negatively inclined.
- If the audience is positively inclined, a kind of shared community can be set up rather easily:
  - Many of the “small details” won't make as much difference.
  - The form that is chosen is not so important.
  - The document can be brief and informal.
  - Words that have some emotional bias can be used without causing an adverse reaction.



# WHAT ARE THE AUDIENCE'S COMMUNITY ATTITUDES? – *HOW DOES THE READER FEEL ABOUT THE SUBJECT AND THE SENDER?*

- The reader's feelings can be described as positively inclined, neutral, or negatively inclined.
- If the audience is neutrally inclined:
  - Much of the same applies as for the positively inclined audience.
  - A writer can choose a variety of forms, perhaps a memo, or just a brief note.



# WHAT ARE THE AUDIENCE'S COMMUNITY ATTITUDES? – *HOW DOES THE READER FEEL ABOUT THE SUBJECT AND THE SENDER?*

- The reader's feelings can be described as positively inclined, neutral, or negatively inclined.
- If the audience is negatively inclined, the writer cannot assume a shared community:
  - Small details must be attended to carefully.
  - Spelling, format, and word choice become even more important than usual.
  - This is because such readers may seize upon anything that lets them vent their frustration or anger.
  - Even such seemingly trivial documents as the meeting announcements can become the source friction with such type of an audience.





# WHAT ARE THE AUDIENCE'S COMMUNITY ATTITUDES? – *WHAT FORM DOES THE READER EXPECT?*

- To be effective, you must provide the audience with a document in the form they expect.
  - Example 1: a manager who wants a brief note to keep for handy reference maybe irritated if he gets a long, detailed business letter.
  - Example 2: If an office manager has set up a form for reporting accidents, she will expect reports in that form.
    - If she gets exactly what she specified, her attitude may easily turn from neutral to positively inclined.
    - If she receives otherwise, her attitude may change from neutral to negatively inclined.



# WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE'S PLACE IN THE ORGANIZATION?

- The easiest way to see how community attitudes apply to writing is to consider writing about the same topic to different people in the same organization.
  - Every organization has a hierarchy of positions.
  - Your audience is located above, at the same level, or below you.
  - If the audience consists of people from several positions in the hierarchy, the audience is “multiple”.



# WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE'S PLACE IN THE ORGANIZATION? – *AUDIENCES IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS*

Let's read pages 68 through 71 together



# WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE'S PLACE IN THE ORGANIZATION? – *MULTIPLE AUDIENCES*

- Multiple audiences: readers at many levels, all need information to act.
  - For example: a group of people may need cost figures, another technical details of the project, etc.
  - If the group as a whole must decide if or not to accept the proposal, an ineffective treatment of just one group's area of special interest could cause the proposal to be rejected.
  - Multiple audiences are the hardest to write for.
    - Use two methods: *General description* and *Specific indication*.



# WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE'S PLACE IN THE ORGANIZATION? – *MULTIPLE AUDIENCES*

- *Choose a General Description* “describing the topic in general manner”: Done by writing nontechnically so that audience will understand it.
  - You would have to present a document that assumes that readers have less knowledge and will not understand terms (technical terms about some machine)
  - If you assumed that everyone knew the terms, many people would not be able to understand the memo.



# WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE'S PLACE IN THE ORGANIZATION? – *MULTIPLE AUDIENCES*

- *Label Sections for Specific Readers*

- Label sections and specifically indicate the audience for each section.
- Read the example if pages 72 and 73.



# WHAT IS THE AUDIENCE'S PLACE IN THE ORGANIZATION? – *SECONDARY AUDIENCES*

- Is someone other than the intended receiver who will also read the document.
  - Often, you should write with such a reader in mind.
  - The second reader is often far from the writer, so the document must be formal.
  - Let us read the examples of pages 73 and 74.



# HOW WILL THE AUDIENCE READ THE DOCUMENT?

- The audience's reading style – the strategy they use to grasp information – varies considerably.
  - Skimming: reading quickly to get the general point.
    - A reader who skims is usually interested in the main idea, not the details.
  - Scanning: reading quickly to find specific information.
  - Search reading: scanning and then focusing on the meaning of a specific word or section.
    - A reader who scans or searches is interested in details only where the information that satisfies his or her needs appear.





# HOW WILL THE AUDIENCE READ THE DOCUMENT?

- The audience's reading style – the strategy they use to grasp information – varies considerably.
  - Receptive reading: reading for thorough comprehension.
  - Critical reading: reading for evaluation.
    - A reader who reads receptively or critically wants to find all the main ideas, to get all the details, and to understand their interrelationships.



# HOW WILL THE AUDIENCE READ THE DOCUMENT?

- For a reader who will skim, scan, or search use these devices:
  - State your purpose explicitly.
  - Use clear headings.
  - Use topic sentences at the beginning of paragraphs.
  - Use visual aids.
  - Use a format the makes key ideas prominent.



# HOW WILL THE AUDIENCE READ THE DOCUMENT?

- If a reader will read receptively or critically, add these features:
  - Repeat terminology; do not vary it.
  - For nonspecialists, use examples, definition, and comparison.
  - For specialists, use standard terminology.
  - Move from the general to the particular to explain main ideas.
  - Use lists to present details.

Read example of page 76

