

forum

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Reaching People Through Writing. Writing for publication is writing for people. Knowing in advance for whom you're writing will make your task easier and help you deliver your message.

News columns or bulletins present an opportunity to have personal, one-way communication with the reader. You can tell a story without interruption, but you must present it in a lively, interesting way so people will take the time to read it.

Before you begin, remember that writing isn't a silent process between you and your typewriter. Think about the people you're trying to reach. Readers will appreciate information written just for them.

Although you may want to reach as many people as possible, you can't write for everyone. Begin by deciding who's

likely to be interested in the information. Then start your writing by telling the readers not only what the most important information is, but how it will help them. For example, a producer is more likely to be interested in new technology to save money than in general information.

You need to explain at the beginning of a column or article that you're sharing this information because use of it will help. Competition for reading time is rough. People have more reading material than time.

To be able to tell your audience how information affects them, you must clearly define the audience. Think about publications you enjoy reading, such as this one, and try to determine why they appeal to you. For what kind of audience are they written?

Know these things about your readers: What do they want or need to know? What will they understand? How well can they read? How much time do they have to read? Will they understand the same technical terms you do? Will they take the time to look up words in the dictionary, or will they read something else if they can't understand your article?

Through writing you can communicate, but your audience doesn't have the opportunity to ask questions. You're responsible for being concise, accurate, and complete. You also have the advantage of being selective about what you include. What's relevant to your audience? Because you're reading this forum now, I can only assume you're interested in writing. But, just because you've joined my audience, doesn't mean I can bore you with a cute story about my Irish setter. (I have no reason to assume you're interested in dogs or me.)

If you're writing a news column, your audience may include a wide range of people. Direct that writing to the person with the least technical background, the lowest reading level. Then all members of your audience will be able to understand it. If you want to present the same information to two audiences, you may have to write two articles. You can't reach nine-year-olds and agricultural engineers with a single story. Be sure you write to the smallest group possible. The larger the audience, the weaker your message.

When you can focus on all those faces beyond that blank sheet of paper, writing for publication will become less intimidating.