

Customizing Your Writing for Your Audience

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As the primary form of communication, language affects us on many different levels simultaneously, some of which we may not be aware of. Academic writing is no different since it imparts information that is factual and timely and also creates a subliminal sense of connection with the reader. One of the best ways to create such a deeper level of understanding and connection is to customize the writing for your intended audience.

In the 1700s, the physician Samuel Hahnemann developed the idea that is also known as “the law of similars,” and his theory led to the field of homeopathy. In contemporary social science, communications experts such as John Grinder (a linguist and business management consultant) have promoted the idea of developing interpersonal rapport through matching the language of others, both verbally and nonverbally. By doing this, we can create a sense of mutual trust.

Consider the Different Levels of Communication

Writing is a direct form of communication with the reader, and “speaking the reader’s language” works to create a rapport on two general levels: the intellectual and the subconscious.

- *Intellectual Rapport:* Using terms and phrases that the audience is familiar with helps the readers to understand the factual meaning more easily. Similarly, sharing a common language works in the same way. For example, when communicating with a friend who is a native Spanish speaker, you would use Spanish whenever possible to ensure a higher level of understanding.
- *Subconscious Rapport:* Although this may be a bit more difficult to track objectively, most of us have experienced it in the form of a “gut feeling” when another person understands our feelings and experiences even when we don’t know why this happens consciously.

Getting to Know Your Audience

Before you begin writing your article, learn as much as you can about your target audience, especially if you are writing for readers in a field other than your own.

Consider whether the readers tend to focus on people, things, or concepts. This can help you in selecting the right words and tone that will have a greater impact on them. For example, when writing for readers in a “life sciences or physical sciences” field such as physics or biology, you could choose a more formal tone and stick to logic and facts while on the other hand, when writing for readers in a “social sciences” field such as psychology or history, you might present a more informal tone that is more conversational and engaging.

No matter the field or the target audience you want to address, effective writing is both intellectually accurate and personally suited for the reader. Just as we are more likely to remember receiving a personalized, hand-addressed letter, similarly, readers are more likely to remember a writing that “speaks” to them and feels personalized for them.

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