

“You Talkin’ to Me?”

Determining the Focus and Organization of Your Argument

1. **AUDIENCE:** Before you begin writing, picture your specific audience sitting across the table from you. Who is it exactly – a PTO mom, a specific politician, your neighbor, a family member, a work colleague, etc.? Your goal is to personalize the response to answer the intended audience’s exact questions or respond to their specific concerns.
2. **THESIS:** Now, figure out your audience’s MAIN concern or objection to your position. What are their fears, priorities, values, world or cultural views that influence their thought process? Addressing these ideas will give your thesis focus, making it meaningful for your audience.

Main Concern of the Opposition + Your Debatable Assertion + Because Statement

EXAMPLE: **Although Carol Wallace forcefully argues the importance of establishing independence in today’s youth, American children should not be allowed to select their own meals at school, because they lack knowledge concerning proper nutrition and healthy food choices.**

3. **ESSAY ORGANIZATION:** In order to create a strong, relevant argument, respond to your audience’s most logical and valid points. Place the response that will be most important or meaningful to your audience at the end of your essay.
4. **SUPPORT:** Will your audience view your support elements as creditable, authoritative, and relevant? If not, find a different way to exemplify or illustrate each point.
5. **CONCESSIONS:** Does your audience have any valid points – even partially? Are there any limits to what you are proposing? In other words, can you make any concessions? Conceding to your audience will make your argument seem more controlled and inviting.
6. **TONE:** Is our language style and word choice appropriate for the target audience? Will the use of humor or slang add or detract from your credibility? Would a formal, academic presentation be more effective? Your goal is to show the intended audience that you are both knowledgeable and trustworthy.
7. **IMPORTANT REMINDER:** Be respectful of your audience’s ideas, values, and belief systems throughout your essay. Be careful not to come off as arrogant, condescending, or intimidating.

Making Concessions

When creating your argument, **DON'T**

- Be aggressive, intimidating, or mean
- Belittle or demean your opponent's ideas
- Come off as narrow-minded, uninformed, or unsympathetic
- Appear arrogant
- Call your opponent names

When creating your argument, **DO**

- Maintain your cool
- Identify any values of your opponent's views or ideas
- Acknowledge the limits of your position
- Establish yourself as logical, fair, and informed
- Demonstrate empathy (identification with, and an understanding of, another's situations, feelings, and motives).

AUDIENCE fits in the rhetorical acronym:

A	audience
P	purpose
P	pathos
E	ethos
A	angle of vision
L	logos
S	subject

- ❖ Audience, subject, and purpose are related in that they drive the essay.
- ❖ Angle of vision is the writer's perspective, the bias.
- ❖ Logos, pathos, and ethos form the rhetorical triumvirate.

Workshop Activity

Audience Awareness

Question: Should the legal drinking age in the United States be lowered to eighteen years old?

Directions:

1. Get into groups (3 – 4 people)
2. Determine the SPECIFIC target audience by selecting an audience group from the table or choose one of your own.
3. How would you help a student brainstorm ideas to create a rough essay outline that focuses on the needs, concerns, fears, or values of the audience.
 - Thesis
 - Topic sentences
 - Support elements
 - Effective concessions
4. What techniques could you use while guiding a student during a typical thirty-minute tutoring session?
5. Be ready to share your responses – and any helpful tips that you have for helping students foster audience awareness.

Workshop Activity

Example

SPECIFIC AUDIENCE: My father, who supports the war in Iraq.

PURPOSE: Stretch his “intellectual bubble” about creating peace in the Middle East and keeping America safe from terrorism.

THESES: Although many Americans hoped that the military action would weaken our enemies and foster peace in the Middle East, our troops should be removed from the region immediately because their presence is creating more terrorism, ruining America’s reputation, and causing needless death around the world.

TOPIC SENTENCE #1: Although the administration claims that the war would help curb terrorism, violent acts by extreme elements have actually escalated around the world.

- Spain train bombings
- Hostages

TOPIC SENTENCE #2: Many advocates of the war hoped that it would help strengthen America’s reputation as a world leader; however, it has actually done the opposite.

- Loss of allies
- Non-fundamentalists are now angry with us

TOPIC SENTENCE #3: As the war began, the nation hoped that the action would help save lives; contrarily, it has created more victims.

- Civilian deaths in Iraq
- American soldiers

CONCESSIONS:

1. I understand the desire to keep America safe from another terrorist attack.
2. You are right; terrorists must be hunted down and eliminated.
3. America IS a strong military presence in the world and has the responsibility to fight evil.
4. It is unfair to assume that the administration’s actions are guided by some nefarious purpose. Instead, they bear a great responsibility to keep Americans safe.