University of Houston ◢ Clear Lake

WRITING CENTER

Style: Writing Reader-Based Prose

When we write, we often simply record our ideas as they occur to us. Though this is a fine way to begin writing and to generate ideas, it is not always the best way to communicate with a reader. The following strategies will help you to transform the "writer-based" prose you begin with into the "reader-based" prose your audience needs to understand your message.

Analyze Your Audience

Thinking about the needs of your reader will help you at any stage of the writing process. Determine your audience's knowledge and attitude toward your topic as well as its needs. How much does your audience need to know about your topic and how will its attitude affect your presentation?

Anticipate Your Audience's Response

People read creatively by supplying a context for what they read, making predictions about what will come next, creating gists, or chunks of information, and organizing ideas into a hierarchy. How should you structure your information so your reader will understand your point?

Organize for the Creative Reader

- Create and state a shared goal. This will motivate your audience to read and increase comprehension.
- Use a reader-based structure:
    - Organize the paper around a problem, a thesis, or a purpose.
    - Organize your ideas into a hierarchy. Distinguish between major and minor points and make the relationship between the two explicit. Make your conclusions explicit.
    - Use cues to make your organization clear to the reader.

Use Cues to Guide Your Reader

Writers use a variety of cues to demonstrate the organizational strategies they have chosen. In general, your reader will expect you to preview your meaning, summarize when necessary, and guide them through your discussion. Cues can be visual and verbal.

Cues that preview meaning

‣Title	‣Table of contents	‣Abstract	‣Introduction
‣Headings	‣Problem/Purpose Statement	‣Topic sentences	

Cues that summarize or illustrate

‣Sentence summaries at the ends of paragraphs	‣Conclusion or summary sections

Cues that guide the reader visually

‣Pictures, graphs and tables ‣Punctuation ‣Typographical cues ‣Visual arrangement

Cues that guide the reader verbally

‣Transitional words ‣Conjunctions ‣Repetition ‣Pronouns ‣Summary nouns

Develop a Persuasive Argument

We often think that the purpose of writing an essay is to "win" the argument, but simply proving a viewpoint is "right" will not always get someone else to agree with it. If, instead, we think of our goal as finding common ground and clarifying, adding to, or modifying someone's view, both sides will win by gaining better understanding of a topic.

The Rogerian Argument

In a Rogerian argument, the writer first expresses and demonstrates an understanding of the reader's position. This allows the writer to see the issue from the reader's point of view and to better understand any objections there may be. It also allows the writer to establish a common ground with the reader and avoid categorizing people or issues.