

Public Genres

When you write for public audiences, consider that there are different degrees of publicness. When you post on Facebook, for example, you might consider yourself to be writing for your friends, but if you don't have your privacy settings configured to keep strangers from seeing your posts, you are actually composing for everyone on Facebook, over a hundred million readers. In general, you are writing for a public audience anytime you expect people you don't know personally to encounter your writing. Composing for public audiences can take many forms, from creating an art exhibit to writing a letter to the editor to posting a flyer on campus or an image on Instagram. Most composing for public audiences is initiated when a composer is moved to share a message with a public group.

Some of the typical purposes of composing for public audiences are to argue for a position on an issue, to share an idea, and to join an ongoing conversation. For example, you might decide to post a Facebook status update that includes a link to an article about a topical issue to show that you agree with the sentiments presented. You are hoping that anyone who reads your post will then also read the article and see your viewpoint.

If a piece is created for a public audience, you don't necessarily have control over who that audience is. For example, while an initial tweet might only have the audience of your followers, one of your followers might decide to retweet and your tweet would then be received by a group of people you've never encountered. Additionally, this same tweet might be randomly found through a search for a hashtag you used. If we look at audience in relationship to visual art, the viewers might be people literally passing by (if the art is a mural painted on the side of a building), people who specifically went to the art gallery because they know the artist, or people who were visiting the museum and were intrigued by a poster they saw for the exhibit.

WRITE

As the discussion makes clear, you are part of a public audience. Have you ever considered yourself a public audience? If so, in what situations? If not, how does thinking about yourself as part of a public audience change the way you think about genres such as editorials and letters to the editor? Jot down your ideas and share with a classmate.

Genres for public audiences, just like the other genres previously discussed, respond to a rhetorical situation. Consider how many times you learn about something newsworthy via Facebook or Twitter. The composer of the posting has chosen one of these genres because they can reach a wide audience immediately. It is then easy for anyone receiving the information to share that information with others. Another example to consider is a TED talk. When a colleague of Amy shared his approach to a business class that integrated running a marathon during his TEDxYouth presentation, his purpose was to inspire a public audience to be challenged to change their habits by training for a marathon.

Some typical genres for public audiences are posts on social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), blog postings, art exhibits, music and theater performances, and presentations designed for a public audience (such as a TED talk).

Below is an example of a presentation titled "The Doodle Revolution," by Sunni Brown, that she gave as an Ignite talk. Shown here is an excerpt of her talk with abbreviated annotations in the margins. The complete presentation, full annotations, and information about Ignite are available in [Chapter 9, "Public Genres."](#)