

Another purpose for public genres is activism. When considering the concept of genres used for activism, perhaps you first think of protests — people carrying signs with their messages. Maybe you think about famous speeches, such as Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech delivered at the National March on Washington. Have you ever received a phone call from an organization encouraging you to vote a particular way? Perhaps you’ve been greeted on the street by a person with a clipboard, asking you to sign your name to bring a particular issue to the ballot. All of these situations involve genres used to effect change.

The purpose of composing a genre for activism is usually to encourage change or action. For example, if you posted a tweet after the November 2015 terrorist attack in Paris and used the hashtag #PrayForParis, your purpose might be to literally have people take a moment to pray for the survivors of the attack. Sometimes it is to bring an issue into focus. For example, you might decide to hold up a sign at a rally for raising the minimum wage that says, “How about a maximum wage?” Here you would want your viewer to understand that you are concerned about the 1 percent having too much wealth.

The audience for these genres is similar to those we discussed under “Public Genres.” If you are standing at a rally, you might not know all the people who end up viewing your sign. While most of the viewers are others who share a similar opinion since they are attending the same rally, people who do not agree with you might also see your sign (such as when there are counterprotests across the street). You might also be captured on the news, and then anyone who turns on that night’s news sees you and your message. You might also hope that voters or lawmakers will hear about the rally, perhaps on TV or the Internet, and see your sign.

With the rise in social media use and the proliferation of digital devices, participatory or citizen journalism has become a major player when it comes to activism and change. Basically, this means that a public citizen, you, distributes news to an audience. Most often, these acts of individual journalism are designed to highlight an injustice, such as when acts of brutality are videotaped, or to illustrate to a wide audience an event going on, such as the Occupy protests.

**WRITE**

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Make a list of all the genres you can think of in which you’ve seen appeals for public action, such as Twitter, Facebook, and signs. Which ones are you most likely to notice? Which ones have you used for composing messages geared toward social activism and change?

Some typical genres for activism and change are similar to those for public audiences, such as posts on social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and blog postings. In addition, genres such as political speeches, protest signs, and petitions are commonly used to call for an action. Although flash mobs were originally created for entertainment, such as when a group of people gather in an airport and break into dance and song to entertain bored travelers, they can also be designed to effect change. In 2009, an invitation for a flash mob to protest Wall Street read, “Bring a pillow to Wall St. & Broad St. at 3:00 pm. Dress in business suits, demand your bailout.”

An annotated example of a protest poster is below.