

Using Genres to Inform, Narrate, or Persuade

Whether you're writing an academic genre, a workplace genre, or a genre for public audiences, you often need to decide how to make your points. Authors often make their points by giving information, telling stories, and/or persuading.

INFORMING

Purpose: Why share information?

Audience: How do we inform others?

Rhetorical appeals: How do we use them to inform?

TELLING STORIES

Purpose: Why tell stories?

Audience: How do we connect through stories?

Rhetorical appeals: How do we use them to tell stories?

PERSUADING

Purpose: Why write to persuade?

Audience: How do we persuade others?

Rhetorical appeals: How do we use them to persuade?

Giving Information

Information is everywhere, all the time: online, on your phone, in e-mail, on social networking sites, on TV, and on radio. It's on billboards, road signs, and menus. But not all information is equal: some is reliable; some is not. How do we make sense of it all? The trick is to (1) figure out which sources of information are the best, and (2) analyze, use, and share that information according to your needs as a reader or writer.

In daily life, you draw on a variety of sources for information.

- You want to plant tomatoes on your back porch, so you consult a reference book or online guide by the American Horticultural Society on varieties that grow best in your region.
- You want to avoid the flu, so you read the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' latest recommendations online or stop in at your pharmacy for information about the flu vaccine.
- You need to create a presentation using software you don't know how to use, so you refer to a Microsoft PowerPoint tutorial or ask an experienced colleague for a quick lesson.
- There's something wrong with your car and you don't know what the flashing light on your dashboard means, so you flip through your owner's manual, search YouTube for tutorials, or call a knowledgeable mechanic.

In each of these cases, you've found convenient but also authoritative sources.

- *Authoritative sources of information.* Here's another scenario. Let's say you want to prepare for a disaster. You do a quick search on YouTube and turn up a video by a guy in a gas mask who lives in a desert bunker. His instructions seem to have some merit but overall are rambling and confusing. Though the video may be riveting, it is a poor source of information because the author lacks credibility (or ethos) and logic (logos). A better, if less colorful, source would be a government organization such as Homeland Security, FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), or the American Red Cross. These are considered excellent sources because the organizations are long established and made up of experts. The material they publish is researched, written, and reviewed by authorities in the field of emergency preparation; approved by the government; and tested out in actual emergencies.
- *Author bias.* No author is purely objective. Personal viewpoints, inclinations, and prejudices can creep into any communication, whether it's a recipe or a government document. Bias can show up in the language that writers use. Bias can also be apparent in the writer's tone. For example, imagine that an article appears in your local newspaper about a family lost during a snowmobiling trip. You might expect the reporter to simply present the facts. However, after reading closely, you see the reporter's opinion has subtly found its way onto the page: The family's lack of preparation influenced the writer and affected his or her tone and the use or omission of details. On the other hand, imagine that the reporter thinks the family did the best they could have — they were as prepared as possible, but no one could have survived that avalanche. In that case, the writer would use a more sympathetic tone.

Presenting information is not a neutral activity. All writing has a persuasive quality, and informative writing is no exception. Keep this in mind as you read and compose.