5.6: Audience and Reader

During your university education, you will be expected to write a variety of assignments. Your instructor is always your reader, but your instructor is not necessarily your audience. Your audience is the person or group that you are trying to influence. For example, you may be asked to choose a healthcare issue and write about it. You might write a text with a focus on influencing the provincial government about the risks associated with approving cannabis store locations that are near schools. In this case, the government is your audience – but your instructor is still your reader and the person who will evaluate your writing.

You should tailor the content and style of writing to your audience. You also pay attention to semantics so that you choose words appropriate for your audience.

Your audience will vary depending on the topic and purpose of your writing: it may include nurses and other healthcare professionals, educators, researchers, clinicians, students, policymakers, clients, families, healthcare leaders and administrators, or a combination of all of these individuals. If you are writing for nurses, a certain amount of clinical terminology can be expected, whereas if you are writing for clients, you should assume they don’t necessarily have a healthcare background, and use lay language instead. Regardless of your audience, you should always write clearly, concisely, and congruently – these are all attributes of scholarly writing.
Considerations

When making decisions about the audience, consider some of the following questions:

• What does the audience already know about my topic? Can I use simple or complex terms? Can I use jargon? To what degree should I provide definitions of terms? Can I assume a political stance?

• What will compel the audience? Will personal accounts, case studies, or statistics be more influential to persuade the audience?

• What ideological assumptions should I use? For example, does the audience support the topic or are you presenting radical ideas?

• How do I want the audience to feel after reading my work? For example, what emotions will you evoke in your writing, e.g., desire for change? Or do you want just them to consider an issue carefully?