

What are audience, purpose and text type?

“When you are asked to analyse or write creatively in your English Language exams, it is useful to start by looking at three key elements, audience, purpose, and text type. Each of these will affect the tone, structure, and language that you or the writer uses.

The audience is the person or group of people the text is written for. Who the audience is will impact the tone, language choices, and what content is included in the text. The purpose is the reason why you or the writer are writing a text, whether that's to entertain, inform, persuade, or argue a point of view.

A text can often have more than one purpose. For example, it may be to inform as well as to entertain the audience. The text type is the form that the text is written in. It could be an article for a magazine, a letter, a story, or a speech. Each text type has its own set of rules. To bring this to life, let's look at a sample writing task you could get in your exam.

‘School holidays are too long: they are boring for children and expensive for parents.’ Write a letter to your local newspaper, arguing for or against this view. The audience for this text is the readers of a local newspaper. This means you would probably use clear and formal language and make reference to local issues the audience will be interested in.

The purpose of this piece of writing is to persuade the readers of your opinion. You would need to include ideas and evidence that supports your opinion, encounters the opposing view, while using persuasive language techniques. The text type for this task is a letter. A letter begins with ‘Dear’ and ends with ‘Yours sincerely’ as you do know the name of the person you are writing to. It would normally be written using formal language that is focused on the issue.

Now let's take a look at an extract similar to the ones you may have to analyse in your exams.

“What will happen if the House allows this proposal to go through unchanged? The government have decided to leave it to a free vote of the house. I am glad of that, but the cabinet is composed of men, and they cannot be expected to realise how women think on this question. I want to warn them of the intensity of women's feelings about it.”

The audience for this text is Government Ministers in 1945. The purpose is to persuade them to not pass a bill that would negatively impact women. And the text type is a speech.

With all of these in mind, it helps explain why the writer has used formal language and persuasive devices like rhetoric questions to help convince them of her point of view. Establishing the audience, purpose and text type will help you analyse an existing piece of writing and help you with the writing task in your exams. So keep these at the front of your mind when beginning to plan your answers.”