

Understanding the purpose of a text

Introduction

All texts are written for a reason – the writer will have an **aim** or **purpose**, for example to *inform* the reader or to *persuade* the reader. Often, texts have more than one purpose.

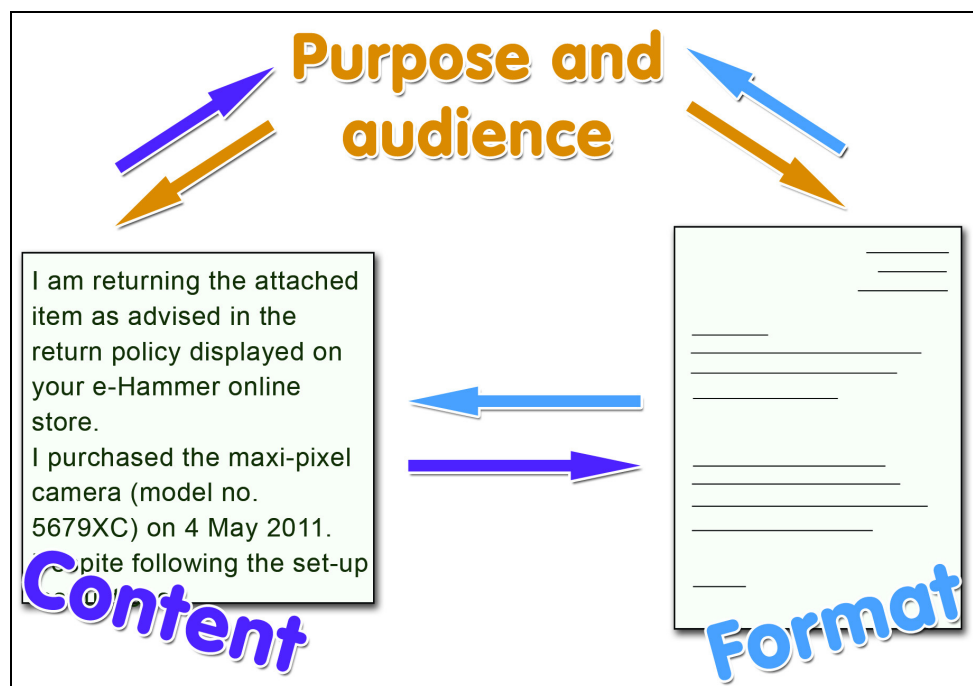
Texts also have an intended **audience** – the people (or person) that the writer hopes will read the text.

Identifying the purpose and audience of a text will help you to understand it better. This understanding of how texts work will also help you improve your writing skills.

In this activity, you will consider the purpose and audience of a variety of texts.

You will learn how to:

- recognise the purpose(s) of a text from its content (structure, vocabulary and style) and format
- recognise who a text is written for (its audience).



- Read the introduction and the 'learn how to' examples carefully before you try the practice questions.
- Use a dictionary to check the meanings of any unfamiliar words.
- When you have finished, **check your answers** with the ones provided on pages 14–16.
- If you are not sure about your answers, check with your tutor.

Understanding the purpose of a text

Learn how to recognise purpose

To work out the purpose of a text, you look at its:

- form and source
- content (sentence structure, style and vocabulary)
- format (the way a text is presented and structured).

Form and source

When you read a text the first thing you notice is its *form*. For example, is it a book, a leaflet, a web page?

The *source* of a text (where it comes from) also gives you clues about purpose. For example, the purpose of a government leaflet is to *inform* whereas a leaflet from your local supermarket will be trying to *persuade* you to buy products.

To decide on the purpose of a text, think what the writer is trying to do. What is the aim of the text? Look at the table below to see some examples of common purposes of texts.

Purpose	This text:	Examples of form / source
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • persuade 	wants you to do or think something	adverts, junk mail, editorials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inform 	tells you about something	newspaper article, government leaflet (e.g. swine flu)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • find out 	asks you to provide information	job application form, survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • entertain 	makes you feel amused, relaxed or absorbed	short story, poem, joke
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • instruct 	tells you what to do	recipes, fire evacuation notices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain 	tells you why something happens or how something works	DIY book, e-mail response to a question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe 	builds up a picture of something in your head	estate agent's property details, bird spotter's guide, <i>travel guide</i>

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Content

The source and form (page 2) give you quick clues about the purpose of a text, but you will also need to look closely at the language the writer uses. This means reading a text in detail and looking at the choice of vocabulary (words and phrases), style, and sentence structure.

Look at the table to see just a few examples of how a writer might choose different language for different purposes.

Content	used to:	Examples
Sentence structure		
Short direct sentences (a) often using the imperative (b, c).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • instruct 	a. You must walk directly to the nearest exit. <i>(from a fire evacuation notice)</i>
Longer sentences using adjectives (d, e).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe 	b. Take one tablet three times a day. <i>(from a prescription)</i> c. Stir in the tomatoes and herbs. <i>(from a recipe)</i>
Style		
Precise formal language with a business-like tone. Often found in letters (f) and reports (g).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inform 	d. I loved the exotic fish restaurant situated in a cosy nook close to the busy harbour. <i>(from a travel review)</i>
Informal language with lots of opinions (often expressed by using adjectives). Often found in advertising (h).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • persuade 	e. This typically orange or yellow mineral is transparent to translucent and forms as elongated, prismatic crystals. <i>(from a 'Guide to minerals')</i>
Impersonal language (using 'it' or 'they' rather than 'I', 'you' or 'we') is often used in reports (g) and (i) explanations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain • inform 	f. I am returning the attached item as advised in the return policy displayed at your e-Hammer online store. <i>(from a formal letter)</i>
Vocabulary		
Basic, easy to read vocabulary is found in many instructions (a) (b) especially those related to health or safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • instruct 	g. Depreciation and amortisation increased by 3.4% to £1.4 m in 2010. However, e-Hammer is pleased to report a 5.2% decrease in trader disputes. <i>(from a financial report)</i>
Technical vocabulary is found in some descriptions (d), reports (g) and explanations (h).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe • inform • explain 	h. An amazing 32 million pixels means you get a superior image quality. Get it quick! <i>(from an internet auction web page)</i> i. A dishwasher uses pressurised water to power its rotor spray arms. These must be allowed to rotate freely so it is important to load the racks correctly. <i>(from a dishwasher manual)</i>

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Practice 1

Use the information tables on pages 2 and 3 to help you answer these questions.

Choose the **main** purpose of these examples. Add them to the correct part of the table on page 2. The first one has been done for you.

- travel guide
- directions to a holiday cottage
- gardening book
- horoscope
- online auction web page
- feedback form on online auction page
- barbecue safety leaflet
- letter from a charity

Practice 2

Use the content of each text to help you decide the purpose of each text and where it might have come from.

Text A

If you have the incorrect goods or a faulty or damaged item, please email us at snapshotsales@ehammer.co.uk and explain your problem. We will respond within 1 full working day.

On condition that the product is within its warranty period, we will arrange, at our expense, the return of the product to us.

This text is from _____

Its purpose is to _____

Text B

Unwrap your camera and check that you have all the accessories (see page 5). Attach the strap to the camera and use it at all times to avoid dropping the camera in use. Charge the batteries for 5 hours before first use. Remove the battery cover and insert the lithium batteries as shown in diagram A. Next insert the memory stick as in diagram

This text is from _____

Its purpose is to _____

Text C

The camera has been inspected and restored to working order by an approved professional vendor. It has been cleaned and/or repaired to meet the original manufacturer's specifications. Features of model 5679XC include x4 zoom facility, 8cm display area, lithium rechargeable batteries, audio and video recording.

This text is from _____

Its purpose is to _____

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Format

The **format** of a text means the way it is structured and laid out (e.g. headings, title, bullets, paragraphs, bold print, fancy fonts, illustrations, diagrams, and captions).

A writer will choose both language and format to achieve the purpose of a text. For example, an information text could include technical vocabulary and use section headings; an instruction text will use imperatives and may have bullet points and/or diagrams.

Look at **Text D**. The writer wants the reader to **do something**. Its purpose is to **influence** or **persuade** the reader to buy a camera. Read the text and think about how the writer uses language to persuade.

Text D

We supply the best brands at the lowest prices! We have received 99.9% positive feedback from our customers. Next day delivery offered on all items.

For a limited period we are offering the maxi-pixel 5679XC camera at a special low price of just £55. An amazing 32 million pixels means you get a superior image quality and don't lose a single detail.

Order now and get your maxi-pixel camera tomorrow.

Examples of **persuasive language** used by the writer.

- Adjectives such as best brands and lowest prices make readers think they are getting a bargain.
- The fast delivery service is mentioned twice ('next day delivery' and 'get your ... camera tomorrow'). This makes the reader think that they could be using the camera the next day.
- Phrases such as '**You** get a superior. . . ' and 'get **your** maxi-pixel' make the reader think that the writer is speaking to them directly. This makes the text more personal and helps to persuade the reader to buy the product.

Practice 3

Use Text D to help you answer these questions.

- Find at least two more examples where the writer uses adjectives to persuade the reader.
- Explain in your own words why the writer uses the phrase 'For a limited period'.
- Comment on other words, numbers or punctuation that the writer uses persuasively.

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Now look at **Text E**. This is an enhanced version of Text D. Text E shows how the writer chooses language and **format** to persuade. The formatting and layout uses many features to catch the reader's attention.

Text E



SNAP SHOT SALES!

Product
FAQ
Payment

We supply the best brands at the lowest prices!
 We have received 99.9% positive feedback from our customers. Next day delivery offered on all items.

For a limited period we are offering the maxi-pixel 5679XC camera at a special low price of just £55. An amazing 32 million pixels means you get a superior image quality and don't lose a single detail.

ORDER NOW AND GET YOUR MAXI-PIXEL CAMERA TOMORROW.

Check out our other superb models [here](#)

Practice 4

Use Text E to help you answer these questions.

- a. List four formatting or layout features the writer uses in the text.

- b. Explain in your own words how these help the text achieve its purpose.

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Texts with more than one purpose

Often a text will have more than one purpose – to identify this you will need to read the text in detail. Look at **Text F**.

Text F

I am returning the attached item as advised in the return policy displayed on your e-Hammer online store.

I purchased the maxi-pixel camera (model no. 5679XC) on May 4th 2011 from your e-Hammer online Snappy-Sales store. Despite following the set-up instructions I am afraid that the camera does not function correctly and loses charge after taking only three or four photographs.

I have purchased items from you before and have never had any problems with your products which I always found to be of good quality and excellent value for money.

I would be grateful if you would send me a replacement camera and refund my postage of £6.45.

informing (top right)

informing (middle left)

persuading (middle right)

persuading and informing (bottom left)

When you first read Text F, you will probably decide that its main purpose is to **inform**. The text is part of a formal letter written to accompany a returned item. The writer is **informing** an online camera store that he or she is returning a faulty item.

However, when you read the text closely you find that the writer is also using **persuasion**. By remaining positive about the company rather than simply listing complaints, the writer realises that he or she stands a better chance of receiving a replacement camera.

Notice also the style of the letter. The letter is written in a formal but friendly style. Although the author compliments the company on their previous good service, the letter finishes on a firm note with the writer making it clear that they expect a replacement. The overall tone of the text is friendly but firm.

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Texts with more than one purpose (continued)


Texts with a hidden purpose

A text might also have a 'hidden purpose' that is different from its apparent purpose. For example, junk mail that appears to inform readers that they have won a prize might really be persuading the reader to do something such as phone a high tariff phone number. This is why it is important to think about whether you know or trust who the text has come from.

Read **Text G** carefully. Think about its form and source before answering the practice questions.

Text G

From: Royal Bank of Wales [RBW@onlinestatement.rbw.co.uk]
 Subject: Important Notice: view your November account statement



The UK's best bank

Dear valued Bank Wales Customer

Your latest RBW Bank Credit Card statement is now available for your online viewing.

Simply log onto your Personal Internet Banking page (link below), select your credit card and then go to 'view/download statements'. The statements will be in PDF format and you will be able to view, download, save or print them as you requiring.

[Proceed to RBW online](#)

Please note that the minimum payment must reach us by the payment due date. These details will be shown on your online Credit Card statement.

This email refers to your credit card account endings 3970: You will be asked to input further details when you follow our secure link above.

Best regards
 Llewellyn Pitt
 Head of Customer Communications
 RBW Bank plc

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Learn how to identify the intended audience of a text

Good writers have a specific audience in mind when they write a text.

Texts such as a newspaper article or a TV guide have a wide audience, normally described as ‘the general public’. Other texts are written for specific groups such as children or people with special interests and hobbies. Some texts, such as an informal letter or a note, are written for just one or two readers.

To work out the audience look at the way a text is written. Think about:

- **the vocabulary and sentence length** – both can give you clues to the age and skills of the audience; they also give you clues about the specialist knowledge of the reader.
- **how the writer addresses the reader** – again the language, grammar and sentence structure will often give clues to the relationship between the writer and the reader and how well they know each other; for example, does the text address you directly, or is it written in impersonal or more formal language. (Check the table on page 3 for examples.)

You can often work out the audience just by reading the title or main headings of a text. The format of a text also gives you clues – for example pictures and large clear font in a children’s story book. Sometimes you will need to read a text in detail in order to work out the audience.

Look at these examples.

2010/2011 The Phone Book. Oxford
Audience: the general public (anyone that needs to look up a phone number)

YOU AND YOUR ADOLESCENT
Audience: parents (of teenage children)

Exclusively for our card holders. 20% off event. Wed July 21st 9am – 9pm. Your voucher is inside. The Clothes Store
Audience: adult shoppers who have a store credit card

Long ago a farmer had a goose called Esmeralda. One morning the goose laid a golden egg.
Audience: children

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Practice 6

Read the information on page 10 before you answer these questions.

a. Look back at texts A, B and C on page 4. Who is the intended audience of each text?

A

B

C

b. Complete the information in the blank parts of the table below. In the last three rows, write one or two sentences of your own for the given audience.

Sample text	Intended audience
(i) <i>Apples, dinner for tonight</i> <i>Collect my new glasses</i> <i>Take back library books</i> <i>Petrol</i>	
(ii) Change to no. 10 needles. Decrease 1 stitch at the end of the next 3 rows.	
(iii) Cheesy baked faces are easy to make, but ask an adult before you use the oven.	
(iv)	Football fans
(v)	New mothers
(vi)	Jobseekers

Understanding the purpose of a text**Check your skills****Warning signs**

- Beware of hype and extravagant promises. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- You are contacted out of the blue. You may get a phone call, e-mail or letter from someone you've never heard of.
- You have to make a quick decision. Scammers don't like to give you time to think. They will try to pressure you into making a decision by saying things like 'If you don't act now, you'll miss out.'
- You have to give away bank account details. Trustworthy firms will never contact you to ask for this information.

(Adapted from www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/watch_out)

1. This text is part of a longer text that is available in two different formats. These are most likely to be:

- a leaflet and a poster.
- a web page and newsletter.
- a letter and a web page.
- a web page and a leaflet.

2. The source of this text is:

- unknown.
- an official web site.
- not to be trusted.
- a blog.

3. The main purpose of this text is:

- to explain.
- to inform.
- to describe.
- to instruct.

4. The audience of this text is most likely to be:

- government employees.
- online sellers.
- internet users with online banking.
- the general public.

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- 5. Adjectives are used in this text to:**
- a. describe technical items.
 - b. to persuade you to visit the consumer direct web site.
 - c. to clarify meaning.
 - d. to make the text more enjoyable to read.
- 6. The content and style of this text can best be described as:**
- a. formal.
 - b. direct and informative.
 - c. persuasive.
 - d. over-friendly.

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Answers

Many of these are suggested answers. You might have written something different or had an idea that is also correct. Talk to your tutor if you are confused.

Practice 1 (page 4)

Purpose	This text:	Examples of form / source
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> persuade 	wants you to do or think something	adverts, junk mail, editorials, <i>online auction web page</i> , <i>letter from a charity</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inform 	tells you about something	newspaper article, government leaflet (e.g. swine flu), <i>barbecue safety leaflet</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> find out 	asks you to provide information	job application form, survey, <i>feedback form</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> entertain 	makes you feel amused, relaxed or absorbed	short story, poem, joke, <i>horoscope</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> instruct 	tells you to what to do	recipes, fire evacuation notices, <i>directions to holiday cottage</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explain 	tells you why something happens or how something works	DIY book, e-mail response to a question, <i>gardening book</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe 	builds up a picture of something in your head	estate agent's property details, bird spotter's guide, <i>travel guide</i>

Practice 2 (page 4)

Text A is an extract from the 'Returns Policy' of an online seller. Its purpose is to **inform** the reader how to return a faulty or damaged product.

Text B is from a camera instruction manual. Its purpose is to **tell or instruct** the reader how to use the camera.

Text C is an extract from the product specifications section of an online camera store. It is **describing** the condition and the technical specifications of a camera.

Practice 3 (page 5)

These are sample answers – your answers may be different and still be correct. Talk to your tutor if you need help. (The adjectives are underlined.).

- amazing 32 million pixels; superior image quality; special low price
- This makes the reader want to buy the camera immediately before the price goes up.

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- c. 99.9% makes it sound as if many customers have been pleased with the product (even if there have really only been a few customers). The exclamation mark grabs the reader's attention and makes them believe they would be getting a bargain.

Practice 4 (page 6)

These are sample answers only – there may be more formatting features.

- a. Block capitals, yellow highlighting/background, different fonts, camera image, logo, bold font, links to see other related items, tabs at top of page to go to help or payments details.
- b. The bold font draws the reader's attention to particularly persuasive language. The picture is important – it's very unlikely that anyone would buy an item without seeing what it looks like first. The tabs with extra information mean there is not too much information/clutter on a single page and that all the technical and payment information is hidden on first view, so the reader is hooked in first by the format.

Practice 5 (page 9) (Sample answers)

- a. When you first look at the text you think it is an e-mail from a bank **informing** you about your latest credit card statement. Most of the e-mail is written in formal language and this makes you believe that it has come from your bank. It is set out quite clearly and professionally, using paragraphs and sensible everyday fonts – again making you believe it is from a bank.
- b. The source of this text is a bank.
- i) **False.** It is not from a bank but from someone purporting (pretending) to be a bank.
- ii) When you read the e-mail closely, you realise that it is not from a bank at all but a fake organisation using a similar name to a well-known UK bank. A bank is unlikely to address customers as 'Dear valued Bank Wales customer'; they would know your name since you bank with them. Plus the name of the bank in the address is different to the name in the email heading. You might, if you have online banking, also notice that the e-mail address is unfamiliar and not the same as any previous genuine e-mails you have received from your bank or credit card company. This type of text is known as a scam.
- c. The writer has tried to hide the real purpose of the text.
- (i) The real purpose of the text is **to persuade** you to follow a web link and then input your credit card details allowing the sender to use this information fraudulently.

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(ii) There are several clues, such as:

- The tone isn't quite right – the way it is 'signed' by a Llewellyn Pitt is a little too familiar for a genuine bank e-mail, and the Welsh name 'Llewellyn' seems rather too much of a coincidence for a Welsh bank.
- The instructions to follow the link are quite forceful: 'Proceed' to RBW online. You would expect a real bank to use a more formal and less forceful tone.
- The 'You will asked to input further details when you follow our secure link above' sounds suspicious.
- There are also spelling and grammar errors that are very unlikely to be present in a real bank communication. For example 'downlaod' instead of 'download' and incorrect and strange phrases such as 'as you requiring' and 'available for your online viewing'.
- The subject line also suggests that it is really important that you read your statement online – again attempting to persuade you to follow the link.

Overall, when you read the text carefully you realise that your real bank has never contacted you in this way before – this e-mail is what is know as a scam.

Practice 6 (page 11)

a. Text A: online shoppers, Text B: owner of a new camera, Text C: a shopper (thinking of buying a camera)

b.

(i) Only the writer of the shopping list

(ii) knitters

(iii) older children

(iv) – (vi) check with your tutor. Here are a few ideas:

(iv) Don't miss any home games this season. Buy your season ticket now.

(v) Do not resume strenuous exercise until 6 weeks after birth. Speak to your health visitor about suitable gentle exercises.

(vi) Benefits available for people actively looking for work.

Check your skills (page 12)

1. d. a web page and a leaflet.
2. b. an official web site.
3. b. to inform.
4. d. the general public.
5. c. to clarify meaning.
6. b. direct and informative.