

Grades 6-8 Determining Purpose and Audience

Strand : Writing

SOL 6.7a, c
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8.7a

Materials

- T chart
- Computers
- Did You Catch That Tone? handout

Lesson

1. Create a T chart on the board with the key words "formal" and "informal." Ask students to brainstorm events or situations that are formal and informal. For example: graduation is a formal event; a picnic is an informal event. Connect the terms to the type of clothing students might choose to wear to an event: the homecoming dance requires formal dress; one wears informal clothing to weed the garden.
2. Make the connection that language can be formal or informal. Ask students to continue brainstorming where they may see formal and informal language adding their ideas to the T chart. For example, texting and slang are examples of informal language, and contracts and letters from the principal contain formal language. Include a discussion about dialectal speech, pointing out that dialect is a type of informal language.
3. From the T chart, develop working definitions of formal and informal language and ask students to write the definitions on the top of the T charts.
4. Explain that just as one makes a decision about what to wear based on where one is going and what one will be doing, writers choose their words based on the purpose and the intended audience. For example, if the writer's purpose is to text a friend to say she's running late, "B there in 5," would be appropriate for the purpose and the audience. If the writer were writing a thank you note to Grandma for birthday gifts, then the language would be more formal with more elaboration of details.

This is a good opportunity to discuss how students use language in electronic and social media. Ask students how many of them use formal language when texting. Ask if they use language differently on a social media site than they do when texting, and is the type of language used in electronic media different than the language required in school assignments. You may find that students gravitate toward more formal language in electronic communication.

5. Tell students that the purpose of writing can be classified into broad categories. Have the students create a web with the following topic: purposes of writing. Direct the students to branch off from the topic with the following categories: persuade, inform, describe, entertain, and explain. Have students develop a definition of each category and provide examples of the type of writing in each category. Record the definitions and examples onto the web.
6. Tell students they will be doing a series of five minutes writings. Emphasize that the writings will not be collected and graded; rather, students should record their ideas without taking stopping for the entire five minutes. Explain that students will have an opportunity to share with classmates.
7. Give students the following prompts. Reveal each prompt one at a time. As a prompt is revealed, give students exactly five minutes to write. Then have the students stop and turn and talk to a neighbor. Students will read their written responses to each other. After students share their responses, reveal the second prompt giving another five minutes to respond. Repeat the writing/sharing process for each prompt. Encourage the students to visualize the person they are writing to, and write directly to that person.

Writing Prompts

- You received a bad grade on a test, and you have to inform your parent that now you are required to stay for after-school tutoring.
 - You discovered a new game, band, or movie, and you are explaining to your friend why you like it so much.
 - You are trying to get someone to do or buy something for you. Maybe you want your parent to buy you a new game system. Perhaps you are trying to convince your principal to allow you to have cell phones in school.
8. Introduce the following terms to the students: tone and voice. Tell them that voice shows an author's personality, awareness of audience, and feelings toward the subject. Voice adds liveliness and energy to writing. Explain tone is used to express an author's attitude toward the subject. Some examples of tone are serious, humorous, enthusiastic, hostile, and sarcastic. Ask students if they have ever heard the phrase, "Don't take that tone with me!" Ask what "tone" the speaker was probably referring to.
 9. Arrange students into groups of four. Give each group student a copy of the attached "Did You Catch That Tone?" sheet. Ask students to each share their first writing with the group by reading it out loud. After each person has shared, the group should choose key words and phrases from each piece that are important to the piece. Record the words and phrases. Then, students should read the words and phrases and indicate the tone of the piece. Repeat this process for each prompt.

Did You Catch the Tone?

Writing 1

Purpose: [to inform]

Audience: [parent]

Key words/phrases:

Tone:

Writing 2

Purpose:

Audience:

Key words/phrases:

Tone:

Writing 3

Purpose:

Audience:

Key words/phrases:

Tone: