

## **The Art of Public Writing**

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Public writing is any piece of writing written for an audience outside the writer's community. It is a piece of writing which is to be read by a considerable large number of people. When a writer sits down to write such a piece for the public, he or she might not have an idea of the enormous size and number of people who would read his or her piece.

Public writing is also the process of brainstorming, planning, and writing any piece that would be read by the members of the public. It follows the procedure of planning one of the best and fastest means of communication to the public. The message delivered to the audience will have to be clear, concise, persuasive, and grammatically correct. The major aim of this piece of writing is to pass across some pieces of information to the audience in any form.

There are several forms of public writing, and there are several uses and importance of public writing. Since public writing involves any piece to be read by the public, there is a wide range of documents written for this type of audience. They include newspaper articles, journal articles, editorials, PR publications, articles on websites, newsletters, and so on. These forms of articles and documents have different intents; however, they are meant to be read by a wide audience. They are similar in terms of audience, and this is what defines how they should be written.

Okoro and Agbo, in defining editorial, use it to equate to other forms of public writing as they state that it is an in-depth evaluation, interpretation, and presentation of important trendy events in such a way that they inform, educate, entertain, and influence the reader (125). Editorials and other forms of public writing follow the same process of interpretation, evaluation, and presentation of matters to the public for a wide range of reasons. Pieces of writing can be for educating the public, entertaining them, or perhaps persuading and influencing their views.

On the other hand, Spencer, quoted in Iyorkyaa, states that editorials and other forms of public writing are the forwarding of facts and opinions in compacted, logical, and chronological order for the interpretation or entertainment of the readers in such a way that the meaning is not lost to the average reader (14). In all, the primary importance of public writing is in the semantics (the meaning) of the pieces, and what messages they convey to the audience. When the meaning and the message are lost, the pieces are of no use to the readers.

This makes the format and content of public writing important. No matter the type or form of any public writing piece, they are usually meant to pass across message to the audience, and this can be done in similar ways. Thus, the format and content of public writing pieces are usually the same.

### **The Format and Content of Public Writing**

The first identified major form, content, or process of public writing in modern history can be traced to Aristotle's *On Rhetorics*. In this book, Aristotle identifies persuasion and appealing to the audience as the most vital content in a piece of public writing. He asserts that since a writer or speaker intends to inform, persuade, and convince the readers and listeners, he or she would have to deploy the very best form of persuasion to achieve this. For Aristotle, there are three techniques to consider for a writer to achieve a great level of persuasion in his or her piece.

Triadafilopoulos, quoting Aristotle, states that the artistic process of persuasion focuses on a set of techniques the writer applies to his piece--these techniques include ethos, pathos, and logos. **Ethos** is the writer's tone and persuasive voice; **pathos** is the audience's emotion and reaction on reading the piece, and **logos** is the rationality of the arguments and points made in the piece (745).

Aristotle considers these techniques as very vital in the formulation of a piece as they are three types and levels of appeals to the audience. They are considered very important principles of public writing, and they are often referred to as "rhetoric" or "Aristotelian triangle." A successful writer would have to know the process of merging the three principles

perfectly to create the right atmosphere in the piece. To perfectly achieve this, Aristotle points out that “since rhetoric exists to affect the giving of decisions ... the writer must not only try to make the argument of his article demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his character look right and put his readers, who are to decide, into the right frame of mind” (22).

This means that the writer should have this Aristotelian triangle on his deck, or in his mind, before embarking on an article meant for the public. The three techniques would have to be properly considered and checked on how to be used before a writer embarks on writing a public piece. There are also other features and elements a writer should consider before writing a piece for the public. The other important element or feature is dialectics.

Aristotle considers dialectics as a vital part of a good article or piece of writing. Molina and Spencer, quoting, Aristotle that Aristotle differentiates rhetoric from dialectics. Whereas he does not override or ignore the importance of rhetorics, he also acknowledges dialectics as a vital element in writing. Rhetoric is the act of persuasion in your writing, while dialectics is the ability to pursue or enact a very logical argumentation of any subject matter (285).

Therefore, it is important that any written work you are writing for the public should be **persuasive** and possess a good **logical argument**. Persuasion is a part of writing that cannot be ignored, and according to Weaver and Hybels, persuasion can only occur when the writer influences the values, beliefs, and attitudes or behaviors of a reader (40).

This basic concept of good public writing is built on the premise that your writing piece has to be convincing and engaging enough for a reader to fully comprehend your intentions. The reader also has to be influenced as such that his views can change. Persuasion and presenting a logical argument can also be interesting for the reader.

In addition to all that has been written about the importance of persuasion, Ukonu gives an opinion on how a piece can be considered persuasive enough. Ukonu argues that a work can be considered persuasive when it changes the psychological functioning of the reader, especially the aspect of the writer. In a nutshell, a piece can be considered persuasive enough if it influences and changes the view of the reader (33).

This persuasion can become toxic in a dictatorial environment as Milton considers compulsion an exaggeration of persuasion. Thus, a reader would have to note that compulsion and persuasion are not the same; although, they are related. Compulsion occurs when the writer wants the reader to focus or understand a view from a singular perspective. This compulsion can be achieved through the compulsive tone and style of the writer.

Milton states that people are not usually convinced by compulsion. Compulsion does not voluntarily induce conviction. It simply silences contradiction in a reader's mind and action, thereby uplifting conviction (17). Compulsion does not work out most of the time because there are very intelligent readers whose democratic mindset will shut out the compulsion, and sieve it out. The mindsets of these people would prefer to choose other pieces of information they are not compelled to accept their views.

This is usually the case where writing and information sharing are censored. When writing is sponsored, the writer must prove to be intelligent and not controlled by the government to be duly read, or the writer would have no reader. Often, people prefer to read an intelligent piece where the views are not imposed on them. They can freely assimilate and choose what to understand and what not to understand.

This means that any piece of public writing must be presented as smartly written and logically correct. If a piece of writing does not pass off as these, the readers would ignore whatever message the piece tries to pass across. Xenophon states that even in the face of censorship, an author must show that he is intelligent and a good writer in general, avoid blunders, and possess the art of writing to be considered worthy of being read (20).

Reiterating what has been stated over time in this art of public writing, a writer still has to know that the best priority of a piece of writing served to the public is to pass across a message or make a meaning. In all a writer tries to do with the style or format of a piece, the meaning should not be lost. This makes Straus argue that it is not about the length of a piece, how long or short it is, but in the exactness. Thus, a writer has to reconcile himself "to the fact there is a difference between winning an argument, or proving to practically everyone that he is right" (497).

## **Uses of Public Writing**

There are different forms of public writing, and there are also different uses of public writing. The differences in the types of public writing do not mean they do not have the same kind of uses. Public writing pieces have almost similar uses, or what they are geared to do or achieve. Some of these uses are:

### **1. Pass Information/Educate Readers**

The primary use of public writing is to pass information and educate readers, especially a wide range of readers. This information and education can also be of different kinds--it can be an attempt to change a reader's view, inform the reader, or present a theory or invention.

### **2. Weigh and Engage Public Opinion**

Public writing can be written to weigh and engage public opinion, especially in cases of public concern. This is the type of piece that is usually deployed by policymakers and company owners. When public opinion is weighed and engaged, the results can be utilized by policymakers or company owners.

To showcase the importance of public opinion, Ate defines public opinion as "the aggregate of the views of members of the society on a given issue. It is the harvest of the views and feelings of members of the public on topical and germane issues of the day" (7). It is important as it weighs the view of the public regarding a subject matter or policy.

### **3. Public Relations (PR)**

Companies can utilize the art of public writing to push for or weigh their public relations. Public writing is the fastest and best way a company can interact with its users, customers, and members of the public. The PR benefits of public writing can also be used by politicians, philanthropists, educational institutions, and so on.

### **4. Debating Issues**

Public writing can be used for debating delicate and vital public issues. This is to create a mindset or atmosphere of those being for the issue or against the issue. Thus, public writing can be used to get majority views and assess the situation.

## **5. Marketing and Advertising**

It is a subtle way of marketing and advertising. This can easily be done when an organization hires a writer as part of the team, and this writer will constantly be releasing pieces regarding the events, releases, and details of the company. The writer can also go ahead to write reviews about their products on the backdrop of how their products are fairing in the market.

## **How to do Public Writing**

In this section, there are different aspects to be examined to showcase how one can do a good public writing piece. The first aspect and step will be x-raying the writing process, and what is involved in it. The second step will be the qualities of a good public writer. After all of these, the readers should be able to write a public writing piece well enough.

### **The Writing Process**

When a person plans to do public writing, there's a process the person should follow. This process is to guide and lead the students right, to enable the student to write well and well. The process and steps are:

#### **1. Brainstorming**

There is a need for brainstorming of subject matter, contents, style, and tone as a person sets off to do public writing--this is the first step. The writer needs to brainstorm to choose his or her topic, the contents he or she is to write, and then the style they would utilize in delivering the piece of writing. It is after the writer has chosen all of these that he or she can finally set off to do research.

#### **2. Researching**

Ate asserts that "research is very important in any form of public writing" (13). Thus, research is a vital process that must be involved in public writing. A good writer needs to research before he begins writing, and the research has to be thoroughly done. This is done to avoid blunders and mistakes in the piece of writing. There are several sources of information or platforms one can conduct his research.

The popular sources for research include the Internet, public discussions, newspapers, surveys, interviews, journals, and magazines. All of these sources can help a writer have an in-depth knowledge of the topic.

### **3. Outlining Point and Making a Rough Draft**

In the process of carrying out research, the writer outlines points and makes a rough draft. This is the first attempt of a writer penning down his or her ideas. It is also the first draft which will serve as a guide to lead the writer to the finished work. This outline and draft can be worked out to become better and to get to become the final work.

While outlining points and making drafts, it is pertinent the writer knows that there are different forms and types of audiences he is writing for. Ate lists the audience types as "the very skeptical audience; the very selective audience, and the obscure or obstinate audience" (30). Therefore, the writer should form the content, tone, and style of the work to suit the psychological and educational understanding of these people. Of course, this is where persuasion and logical argumentation edge the audience to better appreciate and understand the piece.

For students who are learning the art of public writing, McMillian writes that students learn best and offer good public writing pieces when they employ rhetorics in their pieces. They can easily learn by reading pieces of great writers who deploy rhetorics very well (2). It is only pieces that make meaningful impacts on the public that are considered good ones, and thus, they have to be persuasive, engaging, and convincing enough to sway the mindset of the readers.

Furthermore, a writer should know that no matter the type of public writing, there is a format or organizational structure for it. There should be a **title** and a **body** (containing the relevant piece of information). The body appears in essay format, divided into paragraphs of varied lengths. The body, housing the content, should have an introductory part, a middle, and an end. The introduction exposes the topic, the middle contains the majority of the contents and lists out the points, and the end concludes and wraps up the piece.

#### **4. Evaluation and Editing**

The writer continues working on the piece, editing, removing some unnecessary details, adding some details, and refining the piece. There is no limited number of times a writer can revise his or her work. So, it is a continuous process, as pieces are written for the public better with each editing. The writer should properly evaluate the piece to know the best way to bring out its best form.

#### **5. Final Draft and Publishing**

When the piece has been well-edited and has gotten to its best form, the next step for the writer is publishing it. The writer should ensure there are no errors and illogicalities in the piece as it can damage and override the quality of the piece. In addition to that, readers do not take pieces that are marred by errors and illogicalities as seriously.

The alternative to the writing process listed above is the scaffolding method. They are similar, and a writer would still undergo the step-by-step procedure of finishing and publishing a piece written for the public. The scaffolding method is as efficient as the writing process already explored, and it is good for students especially.

#### **Scaffolding**

Scaffolding is the method often used by teachers of public writing. It guides students through the step-by-step procedure where students are given gradual tasks that would build their public writing piece and art of public writing. Thus, students are given tasks intermittently to guide them on the process and art of public writing.



Bliss and Askew state that "it is a step-by-step process that provides the learner with sufficient guidance until the process is learned, and then gradually removes the supports to transfer the responsibility for completing the task to the student" (45). The teacher continuously provides support to the students who learn perfectly before the end of the duration of the lesson.

Scaffolding can only be considered successful when the teacher provides the right and necessary guide to the students (Bodrova and Leong, 5). It is the best writing process for a student still learning the basics of public writing. At the end of the process, the students should deliver an independent and well-written piece for the public.

Finally, a student starting as a writer should know that there are qualities of a good writer of public writing. These qualities determine how well a writer delivers a piece. Writers who are just starting and students should pay attention to these qualities.

## **Qualities of a Good Writer**

### **1. Good Researcher**

For a person to deliver good public writing of any kind, the person has to be a good researcher. The researcher should pay attention to details, know what to research, and should know how to sieve out and use the information obtained. A person who is not a good researcher cannot write a great piece meant for the public.

### **2. Analytical Mind**

Having an analytical mind is the other good quality of a writer. The writer should be able to analyze properly the resources he or she would use in writing the piece, to get the ones that suit the article or write-up. The writer should also have the analytical mind to organize and write his piece properly.

### **3. Mastery of the Language**

A good writer should have mastery of the language before and in the process of doing a public writing piece. A mastery of the language births a piece free of errors, logical, and one which is well-written. It will also mean the writer has a deep vocabulary possession, and he can deliver a well-done work. The writing should also be fluent, coherent, and comprehensive.

#### **4. Attention to Details**

The writer should pay attention to details, especially when he or she is revising and editing the work. The writer should ensure the work is free from all forms of errors, and that it is properly edited. It should be noted that a badly edited work usually turns off readers.

#### **5. Rationality**

The written piece should be rational and logical. There should be continuity in the way the points are made, and they should be valid. Readers, especially intelligent readers, do not love reading disjointed, illogical, and incomprehensive write-ups.

#### **6. Professionalism**

There should be ultimate professionalism in any piece meant for the public regardless of the level of the writer.

### **Conclusion**

The art of public writing is a process one can easily learn and implement to create an excellent write-up for the public. For the students, you can learn it from a public writing expert, and you can also learn it from tutors in the field. Public writing is easy to learn and master, and to be considered good at it one will have to have a general idea of what is required in public writing.

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