

# Workshop 4

## Different Purposes

*“In many cases, purpose determines the form of the writing. Different genres provide [readers] with different experiences.”*

—Judith Ortiz Cofer, author and Franklin Professor of English and Creative Writing, University of Georgia

### Introduction

*Purpose*—one of the two core concepts in writing instruction (*audience* is the other)—can be difficult for students to grasp. Circumscribed by an academic setting where most writing is assigned, they believe (perhaps correctly) that they write simply because teachers ask them to.

The limits of such an understanding are readily apparent. However, helping students construct a richer and more nuanced sense of purpose is a complex and continuous task. To understand purpose in ways familiar to experienced writers, students need to experience a number of authentic writing experiences dealing with a range of authentic purposes. They need to learn to use informal, personal writing as a way to explore their thinking, reflect on their learning, and solidify their understanding. They need opportunities to experiment with writing designed to foreground the pleasures of language. They need to tell stories. They need to demonstrate their understandings of events and relationships. They need to persuade.

As students experience writing for different purposes, they begin to understand how form follows function, exploring how they can use different genres to suit the different purposes they have for writing. Expanding their experience in these ways, they prepare for the complex writing tasks they will encounter throughout their academic, personal, and professional lives.

### Video Overview

The teachers in this video demonstrate ways in which they help students develop a heightened awareness of many different purposes for writing. Visits to their classrooms show how teachers involve their student writers in exploring many forms, including these genres:

- technical writing and other forms of expository work,
- personal, narrative-based writing for newspaper columns,
- persuasive essays,
- journaling, and
- memoirs.

The traditional five-paragraph essay comes under scrutiny as well, with students and teachers weighing content versus form in their respective analyses.

In a writer’s workshop session, Judith Ortiz Cofer guides the group as they condense their thoughts, using one genre or many genres to capture meaning within a single work.

## Key Points

- Writers have many different purposes, or reasons, for writing.
- Purpose often determines genre, the form writers choose for their work.
- Writers often mix or blend genres in a single piece of writing, combining explanation with narration or description, for example, in order to communicate their meaning.
- Helping students experiment with a number of different genres prepares them for the complexities of non-academic writing.

## Learning Objectives

After participating in this session, you will be able to:

- Help students identify and articulate their purposes for writing a particular piece,
- Explain why providing students opportunities to experiment with a number of different genres helps them develop as writers, and
- Help students recognize the value and the functions of different genres in order to make choices that suit the purposes for which they write.

## The Classrooms in This Video

- Joan Cone, Ph.D. 9th grade. El Cerrito High School, El Cerrito, California
- Charles Ellenbogen, 11th and 12th grade. Baltimore City College High School, Baltimore, Maryland
- Susie Lebryk-Chao, 12th grade. Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia
- Lori Mayo, 9th grade. Far Rockaway High School, Queens, New York
- Kelly Quintero, 12th grade. Huntington High School, Long Island, New York
- Renee Spencer, 11th grade. Woodrow Wilson High School, Portsmouth, Virginia

## Featured Voices in the Conversation

- Judith Ortiz Cofer
- Maxine Hong Kingston
- Ruthanne Lum McCunn
- Christopher Myers
- Amy Tan

## Background Reading

Deborah M. Dean. "Muddying Boundaries: Mixing Genres with Five Paragraphs." *English Journal*. September, 2000 53-56. This article is available in the Appendix of this guide.

Optional: For additional resources, visit the *Developing Writers* Web site at [www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop). Select Workshop 4 and Additional Resources.

# Workshop Session (On-Site)

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## Getting Ready (30 minutes)

### Discuss

Discuss the following questions:

- For what purposes do you write?
- How is the purpose for writing linked with the audience who will read the work?

**Facilitator:** Use the questions below to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the questions in their workshop journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few.

### Reflect in Workshop Journals

Consider some ways that you might make your students more aware of the purpose of a piece of writing and the ways in which this identification influences the form a piece of writing takes. Write about one or two of these ideas in your workshop journal.

## Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

### Watch and Discuss

Questions to think about and discuss as you watch the video:

**Pause** at the title card “The Persuasive Essay.” This follows a segment on student journaling.

- Why might *purpose* be a difficult concept for students to grasp and apply to their own writing?
- In acknowledging the purpose for a piece of writing, writers determine the ways in which they want an audience to react to their work on a logical or emotional level. Talk about some of the authentic purposes for which student writers create informative, analytical, or persuasive essays. How can they affect their audiences?
- What genres do your students use most commonly? Which genres do they use with the most skill? What additional genres might you encourage them to try?
- What strategies that you saw demonstrated in the video would you like to adopt for use in your own classroom? Why do you think they would work well with your students?
- What questions or concerns come to mind as you watch the video?

**Facilitator:** If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated below to give participants opportunities to discuss, reflect, and interact with the program. If needed, rewind and replay segments of the program so that viewers can thoughtfully examine all pertinent information. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, ask participants to consider the questions as they view the program and discuss them later.

You may select any or all of the questions below to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants. Encourage participants to respond to the questions they didn't have time to discuss as a group in their journals or on Channel-Talk.

**View** program until the end.

- What do your students need to know about the purpose of their writing before they begin work? What strategies do you use to help students think about and determine their purpose when writing informatively or persuasively?
- How would you define the term *essay*?

# Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

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- Why do you think the classic five-paragraph essay has enjoyed so much academic success? What are some of the benefits students gain by mastering this form of writing? What are some of the drawbacks of using this format exclusively? How can the thinking behind this format be extended into writing essays using other formats?
- What strategies that you saw demonstrated in the video would you like to adopt for use in your own classroom? Why do you think they would work well with your students?
- What questions or concerns come to mind as you watch the video?

## Going Further (30 minutes)

Working in groups of three or four, draw three columns on chart paper. In the first column, make a list of at least 10 writing assignments that students complete in your classes. In the middle column, next to each assignment, identify the assignment's purpose. Is it to demonstrate mastery of particular information? To explore thinking? To entertain? To persuade? In the third column, identify the genre students typically use to complete the assignment. Then try to list two or three other genres that might serve the same purpose.

In the whole group, share your lists and discuss their implications. Are your students doing most of their writing in only one or two genres? Are there genres they avoid? If so, why? How might you help them expand their repertoire?

# Between Sessions (On Your Own)

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## Homework Assignment

### Journal

Are there writing forms that you avoid as either a writer or a teacher? If so, what might you do to become more comfortable incorporating them into your own repertoire? Briefly describe these ideas in your workshop journal.

You may want to address any remaining questions from this session that you did not have time to discuss, as well as thoughts, questions, and discoveries from the workshop itself and learning experiences that take place in your own classroom.

### Reading

In preparation for the next session, read the Background Reading for Workshop 5, found in this guide's Appendix:

- Patricia A. Dunn and Kenneth Lindblom. "Why Revitalize Grammar?" *English Journal*. January 2003 43-50.
- Julie Ann Hagemann. "Balancing Content and Form in the Writing Workshop." *English Journal*. January 2003 73-79.

Optional: For additional resources on topics discussed in this session, visit the *Developing Writers* Web site at [www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop](http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop). Select Workshop 4 and Additional Resources.

## Teacher Tools

The following Teacher Tools are included in this guide for your use in planning classroom activities:

- Foregrounding the Connections
- Key Words and Purpose

## Ongoing Activities

### Channel-Talk

Send comments and questions regarding the workshop to other participants around the country with Channel-Talk. Consider sharing ideas that came up as you wrote in your journal, questions you did not have time to discuss in this session, and experiences from your classroom.

### The Web Site

Go online for materials and resources to deepen your understanding and implementation of the practices shown in the workshop.

# Between Sessions (On Your Own), cont'd.

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## The Classroom Connection

### Student Activities

Try these activities with your students.

- **Analyzing Essays:** After students have read a model essay, give them colored pencils or markers and ask them to work in groups to draw the shape of the essay. Suggest that they identify the main points first and choose a color to represent those. They might choose other colors to demonstrate the ways in which the various points are related. Additional colors might illustrate supporting details, opinions, and/or concluding thoughts. When the groups have finished, have them share and discuss their diagrams with the class as a whole. What does the form of the essay tell them about the writer's purpose in creating it?
- **Different Forms:** Give students a short text—a newspaper article, a poem, or a brief essay—and ask them (alone or in groups) to rewrite it in another genre. For example, they might turn a newspaper account of a local sports event into a limerick or a conversation. They might take a descriptive passage and rewrite it as a persuasive essay written by an ecologist. Have them share their work. Then, in the discussion that follows, ask them to consider how changing the genre forced other changes in aspects of the writing such as tone, diction, point of view, and purpose.
- **Using Many Genres:** Multigenre writing and multigenre writing projects have recently become a part of many students' writing experiences. A multigenre piece is one in which pieces of different genres are drawn together, all related to a chosen theme and using a recurring image. For example, a multigenre piece on civilian reactions to the Civil War might include the following resources, all created by the writer:
  - a letter written from one of the troops to a loved one,
  - a song sheet with a popular tune talking about the conflict,
  - a broadside (an advertisement usually printed on one large sheet of paper) created to rally support for the troops,
  - a poem relating the feelings of a young girl whose brother has gone to war,
  - a newspaper editorial, and
  - a unifying essay that sums up the writer's opinions, etc.

Talk about this kind of assignment with your students. What do they think about the concept? What do they have to know about purpose and genre in order to make a multigenre piece effective? How might they use this form of writing in their own work? What are some of its advantages and disadvantages?

### Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner

Review the writing assignments you typically give your class, thinking about the purpose and genre for each. Do students experience a broad range of writing activities or are assignments focused on one or two genres? How might you modify their experience with different assignments? What would they gain from writing to address a wide range of purposes?