

Checklist for assessing the writing situation

At the beginning of the writing process, you may not be able to answer all of the questions on this checklist. That's fine. Just be prepared to think about them later. It is not necessary to think about the elements of a writing situation in the exact order listed in this chart.

Subject

- Has the subject (or a range of possible subjects) been given to you, or are you free to choose your own?
- What interests you about your subject? What questions would you like to explore?
- Why is your subject worth writing about? How might readers benefit from reading about it?
- How broadly can you cover the subject? Do you need to narrow it to a more specific topic (because of length restrictions, for instance)?

Sources of information

- Where will your information come from: Personal experience? Reading? Direct observation? Interviews? Questionnaires?
- What sort of documentation is required?

Purpose

- Why are you writing: To inform readers? To persuade them? To entertain them? To call them to action? Some combination of these?
- Will your readers care about your purpose? Why do they need to be informed, persuaded, entertained, or called to action?

Audience

- Who are your readers? How well informed are they about the subject? What do you want them to learn about the subject?
- How interested and attentive are they likely to be? Will they resist any of your ideas?
- What is your relationship to them: Citizen to citizen? Expert to novice? Scholar to scholar? Student to instructor? Employee to supervisor?
- How much time are they willing to spend reading?

Length and document design

- Do you have any length specifications? If not, what length seems appropriate, given your subject, purpose, and audience?
- Must you use a particular format for your document? If so, do you have guidelines to follow or examples that you can consult?

Reviewers and deadlines

- Who will be reviewing your draft in progress: Your instructor? A writing center tutor? Your classmates? A friend? Someone in your family?
- What are your deadlines? How much time will you need to allow for the various stages of writing, including proofreading the final draft and printing?