

Writing for a Public Audience¹

Excellent as it may be, the writing you produce for your peers and instructors at Bryn Mawr College may be totally inaccessible to readers beyond our campus's borders. What we do and write in classes, however, has great *value* outside of Bryn Mawr, and for that reason, among others, we should think about and practice how we can share our insights with a broader audience.

"Public writing is a broad category that includes a wide variety of genres: opinion pieces, letters to the editor, blogs, newspaper reports, magazine features, letters to elected officials, memoirs, obituaries, and much more. All of these genres share common features. In particular, public writing aims to be accessible. It is not for specialists. And public writing usually aims to be relevant, even when it engages with the past."

- U. of Toronto

Key Features

Public writing, in general, should adhere to the following guidelines...

1. **Know your audience:** Think about where your piece will be published. Consider who might read it and why.
2. **Provide context, and be concrete:** A public audience will not be familiar with all our course readings or conversations. Provide details and concrete examples to fill in the gaps as you make your argument/points.
3. **Mind your language:** Choose appropriate diction that a wide audience will comprehend. Avoid jargon. Introduce unfamiliar concepts when necessary, but explain them in a simple way. Public writing tends to be less formal than "academic writing."
4. **Do research, but don't write a research paper:** Cut the footnotes. You can refer to others' ideas and statements, but this isn't a report or literature review; keep the references to a *bare* minimum (ideally, don't use them at all). All that said, a piece of public writing should nonetheless be informed by serious thought, research, and investment in a topic.
5. **Don't feel beholden to academic conventions:** Don't bury the lede; get to your point early on. You might begin with an anecdote or even personal experience (if relevant and meaningful to your argument).

Further Resources

- <https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/types-of-writing/public-writing/>
- <https://www.chronicle.com/article/what-academics-misunderstand-about-public-writing>

¹ Partly adapted from Jerry Plotnik, "Writing for the Public," <https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/types-of-writing/public-writing/>.