

Rubric Category	Comprehensive Understanding
Grade/Score	Grades 9-12 / Scores 2, 3, and 4
Rubric Category	Development
Grade/Score	Grades 9-12 / Scores 2, 3, and 4
CCSS Writing Standards	W1, W1b
Argument Type	All arguments

# Know Your Audience: Anticipating Possible Audience Responses

*Students will consider who their audience is and adjust their argument to create appropriate ways to address possible responses.*

## Understanding the Expectations

Writing an argument requires an especially sharp awareness of audience. Because your goal is to convince the audience of your position, you do not want to arouse hostility, generate opposition, or offend. Part of the challenge of writing argument is the fact that not all readers will agree with you—in fact, some may be approaching the topic with pre-formed opinions of their own. The strongest arguments will have considered all valid points of opposition and will show an understanding of the audience’s possible points of view. It is your task to appeal to your audience’s reason and logic, and when possible, appeal to their interests to convince them of your case.

*Consider the topic and audience options:*

- 1. Topic:** What am I writing about, and what am I trying to say about it?  
Here's an example: The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) requires all public schools to use blocking software to prevent students from viewing material that is considered "harmful to minors." Some studies have found that blocking software hinders educational opportunities for students by blocking access to pages that are educationally useful. What is your position on this issue?
- 2. Audience:** Determine the audience for your argument—whom are you trying to persuade?  
Will you be talking about the Internet Protection Act with the school administration? The board of education? Law makers? Parents and caregivers? Fellow students? Each of these groups will likely have different concerns they expect to be addressed.
- 3. Obstacles:** What obstacles will you have to overcome through argument to convince your audience? In other words, what are their concerns?  
In the example above, a classroom teacher is going to have different reasons for wanting/not wanting site-blocking software than a fellow student would. How can you address these concerns and sway your audience? How might they benefit from adopting your point of view?

Working on your own or with a partner, develop a quick list of ideas about the different audiences' possible views toward the Children's Internet Protection Act. Share ideas with the larger group and note feedback and alternate responses.

Considering your audience is no less important when making a literary argument. When writing a response to literature, we often assume that our audience is an intelligent reader who is somewhat familiar with the text. Here are some questions that may help you anticipate and address possible responses to a literary argument:

1. Am I making a claim that most readers would likely agree with, or does my claim require careful and deliberate reading to support?
  - a. If your claim is one most people would agree with, be sure to show

- why your point is still important to make—how do you go beyond the obvious? What is the new, worthwhile information being introduced?
- b. If your claim is one that others wouldn't necessarily agree with or understand right away, how can you address audience skepticism?
  - c. Is your reader likely to have a *bias* that relates to your argument? For example, are you trying to convince the reader that an unlikable character is actually the hero, or that the protagonist of a story is actually the source of his or her own biggest problems?
2. Based on my experience, is my argument likely to be persuasive to other students?
    - a. Consider your experiences in classroom discussion around this topic. What ideas and what support did other students seem to rely on? You don't need to use the same ideas and support, but you should know what matters to your peers, and you should find a way to address these issues.
  3. Are there unusual or thinly-supported aspects of my argument that I need to address?
    - a. Literary critics often write entire essays—even whole books—built on arguments supported by only a few words or phrases in a text. This can be done, and can even be done well, but the writer needs to *know and acknowledge* that the audience may be hesitant to accept this argument. In response, the writer should make a clear, deliberate case for why this evidence should be accepted—and should very clearly respond to the alternate claims a person might make.

## Trying it Out

Using a work in progress, write out the following and fill in with the appropriate information:

1. **Topic:** What are you writing about?
2. **Your position:** What are you trying to say about this topic? What do you most want to convince someone to believe?
3. **Audience:** What type of person or group are you trying to persuade? What are they like and what do they care about?
4. **Obstacles:** What obstacles will you have to overcome through argument

to convince your audience? In other words, what are their concerns? For a literary argument, ask yourself if your claim (or any other part of your argument) is one that people would easily accept or one that people would be skeptical toward.

5. **Responses:** How can you diminish those concerns and sway your audience? How might they benefit from adopting your point of view?

Share ideas with a peer editor and exchange feedback. How will this affect your next step in crafting your argument?

## Writing it Up

Maintain an awareness of audience as you continue to draft, edit, and revise. Continue your revision efforts with the remaining parts of your paper. If you are still in the early stages of your writing, apply the tips to writing as you go. Work on creating mindfulness of the tips you have been practicing. Your goal is to develop good writing habits that include the rules you have been practicing here.