

## **The Writer Within – What Kind of Writer Are You?**

### **Article Eight: Who Is Your Audience?**

*By Janice Alonso*

Even after you've settled on a field (fiction), a category (mystery, amateur sleuth), and a form (short story), you have another vital decision to consider before you begin: Who will be your readers? The group you are targeting is known as your audience. These are the people you'll want to impress and keep them wanting to read more of your work. These people will be your cheerleaders to bring others to your books and/or stories.

An audience can be targeted from many directions. Age, gender, and experience are just three of the major ones authors use to slant their writing. Say you've decided to pen a cookbook. Will it be for children? Young marrieds? Widowers who've never done more than reheat a cup of coffee in the microwave? Or, perhaps you have set your goal to create the next popular children's mystery series. Will it be for ages seven to ten? Preteens? Young adults? Boys? In both the nonfiction and fiction examples from above, your choice of audience will have a direct impact on how you will write that book. Your audience will dictate how you handle subject matter, language, and level of experience.

When you consider subject matter, you'll want to make sure it appeals to that particular audience. Whether you've decided to write a cookbook or a mystery for children ages seven to ten, you'll need to select recipes or plotlines that will pique their interests. You may have a great idea for getting kids to eat their vegetables, but placing those vegetables atop pizzas or tucked inside tacos may be more appreciated by an eight-year-old boy who thinks anything green is gross. Subject matter is just as important in plotlines as well. In most young children's mysteries, for example, there are no murders or violent crimes. Instead, the mystery may evolve around things which seem to disappear for no apparent reason or a person's odd behavior.

The language you use is another key issue. Vocabulary choice, sentence structure, and length of chapters and scenes will need to be shorter, and plotlines more straightforward. When writing for young children watch out for slang and symbolism that they may not understand. Choose instead words and situations with which they will be familiar.

Experience level is just as important. In the cookbook, use only a few simple steps with directions such as stirring, pouring, and mixing rather than basting, pureeing, and broiling. In the mystery, keep the storyline to one major plot with perhaps a closely related subplot. Remember this audience is just beginning. Be careful not to “talk down,” but don’t assume they might have knowledge that would be there for someone older.

I’ve used young children merely as an example audience; go back to the idea of a cookbook written for widowers who’ve never done more than reheat a cup of coffee in the microwave. These men may have been the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, yet their expertise in the culinary arts, at least initially, is going to be more on par with that of a child. Yet, while this man’s kitchen experience may be limited, his age will change the recipes you chose and the vocabulary you use. His age has given him a more sophisticated sense of humor, a larger vocabulary, and the ability to handle a more complicated set of instructions. See, how altering just one factor of your target audience changes the manner in which you’ll write your story?

When I set out to write these columns, I targeted beginning writers and individuals who have been wanting to write but haven’t been able to find a path to accomplish that goal. I could have chosen to target people who have files filled with manuscripts but have so far never been published. Had I chosen the latter audience, I would have begun the columns at a different point and chosen different subjects to guide these writers down a different road. I hope anyone can benefit from what I’ve presented, but these columns are not for everyone. That’s okay. You can’t write something that’s going to appeal, be appropriate, or benefit all. *Everyone* doesn’t read Anne Rice, Bill O’Reilly, and John Grisham. Each author knows his/her audience and writes for that group.

Once you have decided who your audience will be (and it may change from story to story), read what’s already written for them and study what appeals to that demographic.

*Step Seven – Choose an audience and read what they are reading, write every day, and sign your name to it.*