

to write about her experiences; her 1909 memoir is titled *Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days*. Why did she choose to write a memoir instead of poetry or editorials or technical manuals? Most likely, Burton chose the memoir because it was a popular genre in her day that allowed her to tell the story she wanted to tell, suited her interests and skills, and reached the audience she wanted to reach. Maybe if she had been trained in music, she would have written operas, or if she had been born a little later, she would have told her story as a documentary film.


Our clothes were little homespun cotton slips, with short sleeves. I never knew what shoes were until I got big enough to earn them myself. If a slave man and woman wished to marry, a party would be arranged some Saturday night among the slaves. The marriage ceremony consisted of the pair jumping over a stick. If no children were born within a year or so, the wife was sold. At New Year's, if there was any debt or mortgage on the plantation, the extra slaves were taken to Clayton and sold at the court house. In this way families were separated.

—Annie L. Burton

What we do know is that Burton wrote a memoir (a genre), specifically one that detailed her life as a slave. In her memoir, Burton wrote in the first person, portrayed real people, described settings, conveyed conflict, and told stories from her own life. These elements are features of the memoir genre and of any autobiography. Burton's purpose as a memoirist would have been to inform readers about what life as a slave—and later as a free person—was like; another purpose might have been to connect with women readers about what it was like to be a woman and a slave; yet another might have been to engage the imagination of readers. Her audience would have been literate former slaves and white readers, most likely in the North because her book was published in Boston. Her current readers might include students, scholars, and historians who want to read a firsthand account of slave life.

## The Rhetorical Situation

What is *rhetoric*? *Rhetoric* refers to the ability to communicate effectively and with a purpose. So what is a *rhetorical situation*? It's the context in which you create a composition. To put it simply, as a writer, you have a specific purpose and an audi-



Do you read memoirs? What other observations can you make about the memoir as a genre?

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For examples of literacy narratives and memoirs, see the Index of Genres on page G-1.

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ence. You need to know what you want to say; you also need to know your readers' expectations and accommodate them in some way. For example, when you write a review of a restaurant on yelp.com, you know that Yelp readers want to know your opinion of the meal; they also expect specific details about the individual dishes, service, and ambience you experienced.

### Purpose: Why are you composing?

Every time you write—or compose anything, in any genre—you do so for a reason. In this book, we've identified three main purposes for composing:

- » To present a narrative / to tell a story (Chapter 2)
- » To inform (Chapter 3)
- » To persuade (Chapter 4)

There are many reasons to write and sometimes these reasons overlap. As writers, we often have several purposes for creating a single text. Let's look at a possible example. Let's assume that you love farmers' markets and want to establish one in your town.

**Your purpose** You want to start up a weekly local farmers' market. To make this happen, you need to (1) present your idea to others and (2) persuade them that it's worth acting upon. You expect that some people will object.

**Your rhetorical situation** In this context, you have more than one purpose. In order to persuade others, you need to explain your idea, say what's great about it, provide supporting statistics, and tell a persuasive story about how a similar plan succeeded in a neighboring town. You also have more than one audience. Some people will agree with you 100 per-

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### CHECKLIST Composing with a Purpose

As you begin to compose, ask yourself:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Why am I writing? What do I want to communicate? And to whom?                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> If I'm telling a story, why is it significant, and how will I make it compelling?             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> What do I want my audience to believe or do after reading my composition?                           | <input type="checkbox"/> If I'm sharing information, why is it important, and how will I communicate its authority?    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is what I'm communicating objectionable or controversial to anyone? If so, how will I address this? | <input type="checkbox"/> If I'm trying to persuade others, what are the best ways to do so, for my particular readers? |

cent; others won't be so sure; still others, maybe grocery store owners or city planners, will reject your idea altogether.

**Your plan and genre choice** After considering your purpose and audience, you decide to write an editorial on your local newspaper's blog. You also plan to present your idea in person at the next town meeting.

As you begin writing your editorial, you may shift your purpose slightly—away from simply proposing and arguing for your plan—and toward focusing on the success of neighboring towns' farmers' markets and how they benefited local grocery stores. This will boost your persuasiveness with your resistant grocery store owners.

However, you may decide that rather than an editorial or a presentation, some other genre might better serve your purpose. For example, you may find that the best way to establish a farmers' market is to take a more personal approach by writing a letter to the mayor. You might also survey local citizens to see whether they'd like the opportunity to buy produce from local farmers. The point here is to see how your purpose affects your choice of genre, and how you can work in your genre to impact your audience.


### Audience: Who are you composing for?

Every time you compose, you do so for an audience. Audiences are made up of people—and people can be easily bored, pressed for time, or generally disinterested. You need to grab their attention and keep it.

Let's look at an example: Imagine you are traveling across the country and want to tell stories of your adventures (your purpose) to your friends, family, and even strangers interested in travel (your audience). You decide that the best way to reach your audience is to create a blog where you can write about your experiences, show maps and photos, and connect to other social media sites. That is what the world-traveling blogger who calls himself Giladhiz decided to do (see p. 10).

Giladhiz clearly understands his audience and wants them to stick with him. To this end, he:

- » Provides a photo of himself and an "About the Author" section so that readers can make a personal connection with him.



What genres have you written in today? Why? And who were your audiences?

### CHECKLIST Composing for an Audience

As you begin to compose, ask yourself:

- Who is my audience in terms of demographics? Are they mostly male or mostly female? What is their age range? Where do they live? What do they like? Do they have particular religious beliefs? Are they from a particular social class? Are they of a particular race or ethnic background?
- What is my audience's stake in the issue I'm presenting? Do they care? Why or why not?
- What does my audience value? Will my message be in line with—or contradictory to—their values? How can I present my message so that my audience will consider it? And perhaps even be persuaded by it?
- What level of education does my audience have? What kind of language will best reach them?



the  
**Bedford**  
**Book** of  
**Genres** ◀

a guide

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