

Acts of writing address an audience and purpose, so the first step in determining how to manage a product is to determine who the audience is and what the purpose is for the product. Products (essays, reports, articles, etc.) cue writers in the effort to determine the types of writing and text structures to employ in their works. Likewise, students can learn to look for cues that help them determine how to construct and shape their compositions. These cues help them determine whether, for example, language should be formal, technical, or informal or they should argue for a cause or explain a theory. Teachers can teach students how to unlock these product-cues to shape their compositions by teaching them that each product-cue tells them how they should adjust their language, structures, and strategies. Some examples are below. (See Product Cues Chart for more descriptions of products and their cues.)

Essay: an essay is an academic or formal composition. Essays can use any of the three types of CCSS writing. Its key features are a formal structure and the use of credible sources derived from texts, research, or experts to examine an idea or argue a claim. Language is formal and of the discipline; tone is one of serious, logical examination. An essay includes citations and sometimes a bibliography. “Essay” is a term used most often in the humanities and audiences are generally academic or professional.

Report: a report is an organized presentation of information. It can be either argumentative or informational/explanatory. Its key features are the use of a formal structure and credible sources derived from texts, research, or experts to examine an idea or argue a claim. Reports cite their sources or references. It tends to be a term used in the sciences, technical, and business disciplines, and audiences are academic, business, and technical professionals. Variations of the report include lab report, memos, project reports, and briefs.

Article: an article is a journalistic product that follows the protocols of that field. An article uses many of the same features as an essay or report but employs language that appeals to audiences outside of the academic community so language is less formal and more colloquial. Articles don’t usually formally cite sources but refer to them within the body of the work. Variations of the article include memoirs, travel articles, feature articles, and discipline-based articles appearing in general readership publications, such as newspapers and magazines.

Editorial: an editorial is a work that expresses an opinion or bias. Writers of editorials generally back their positions up with some references to sources but in a less formal way than essays or reports.

Proposal: a proposal is a business or government document that identifies a problem and advances a solution. Proposals require formats specific to the audience. For example, a business proposal would include a cost-benefit analysis, and a government proposal would include a review of the literature. Language is formal and the goal is to convince the audience (e.g. grantor or agency) to fund or support a project.

Non-fiction Narrative: a work that tells a true story while informing the reader about something or examining an issue. These works include memoirs, accounts of an event, or biographical accounts. A writer uses stylistic devices to engage a wide readership and to entertain to some degree. Non-fiction narratives can range from the humorous to the serious. Travel articles, accounts of an event in WWII, or a sketch about a real life experience are examples of non-fiction narratives.