

# From Reading to Writing: Strategies to support genre awareness

## Understanding Genre Awareness

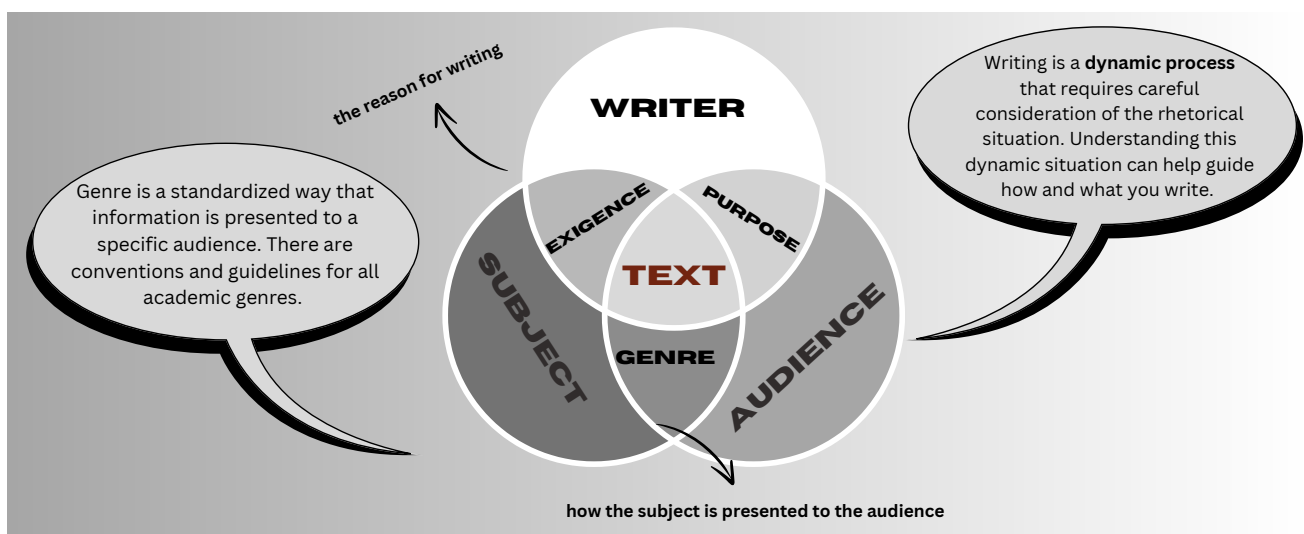
**Genre awareness** involves recognizing and understanding the conventions, structures, and purposes of different types of writing within academic disciplines. Understanding the nuances of genre-specific writing (e.g. article) is essential for producing scholarly work that meets the standards of your field.

Developing genre awareness can help you adapt your writing to fit various academic genres, such as research articles, literature reviews, policy memos, and research or grant proposals. As you become more aware and more comfortable with the genre, you can begin to add more of your own voice to it.

For readers, genre awareness enhances comprehension and appreciation of a text. By recognizing the genre, readers can better anticipate the structure and purpose of the writing, which aids in understanding and interpreting the content. Awareness can also make you more efficient readers.

### Key Concepts

**Rhetorical Situation:** The context in which writing takes place, including the purpose, audience, setting, writer, exigence or reason for writing. It can be very useful to map out the situation.



**Genre Conventions:** Standardized ways of organizing and presenting information in genre.

**Disciplinary Norms:** Disciplinary norms refer to the specific expectations and conventions within a field of study regarding how to structure, present, and support arguments, including the use of

evidence, style, and citation practices.

# Practical Strategies for Developing Genre Awareness

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## Pre-Reading Strategies

**Identify the Purpose:** Understand why you are reading the text. Are you looking to understand a concept, gather evidence, or analyze the writing style?

**Preview the Text:** Skim the headings, subheadings, abstract, and conclusion to get an overview of the structure and main ideas.

## Active Reading Strategies

**Analyze the Structure and Organizations:** Identify common structures. Pay attention to how different sections (e.g. introduction, methods) are organized in academic writing genres.

**Outline the Text:** Create outlines of several academic texts in the same genre in your field to see commonalities and differences in structure. This will help with identifying common conventions.

**Focus on Language:** Look for recurring phrases, terminology, and sentence structure used. Try to mimic the writing style of highly-cited pieces in the genre you are learning to begin to understand the tone and formality expected. Once comfortable, you can begin to develop your own voice.

**Identify Rhetorical Moves:** Note how writer introduce their topics, make arguments, cite sources, transitions between sections, and conclude the genre you are learning. Observe what kinds of appeals are most common (ethos or authority, pathos or emotion, logos or reason) in the genre.

**Annotate the Text:** Highlight key points, make notes in the margins, and mark unfamiliar terms. Focus on how the text is organized and the language used.

**Identify Genre Features:** Look for common elements in the text, such as the introduction or conclusion to understand the purpose of each section and *how* writers approach them.

## Post-Reading Strategies

**Summarize the Text:** Write a brief summary (e.g. annotation) focusing on the main points and how they are presented. Keep these annotations organized for quick reference. Abstracts are good examples of concise summaries and can serve as a model for writing quick annotations.

**Compare with Other Texts:** Read multiple texts in the same genre to identify common features and variations. This will help identify required genre features and give you a sense of how a writer approaches individuality in their writing while adhering to genre conventions.

## More on Identifying Genre Features

Understanding and analyzing a genre is crucial for effective academic writing. By examining its purpose, audience, structure, and style, you can gain insights into how to approach your own writing.

This list of questions helps identify key genre features and characteristics, aiding in the development of skills to produce well-crafted academic work. They are designed to support your genre analysis.

### **Understanding the Genre**

- What is the primary purpose of the genre? (e.g. inform, persuade, analyze)
- Who is the intended audience for this genre? (e.g. scholars, policymakers)
- What are the key characteristics or conventions of this genre? (e.g. structure, format, tone)

### **Structure and Elements**

- What are the common sections or components of this genre? (e.g., introduction, methods)
- How are arguments or ideas typically organized within this genre? (e.g., chronological)
- What types of evidence or sources are typically used in this genre? (e.g., empirical data\_

### **Writing and Style**

- What is the typical writing style or tone used in this genre? (e.g. formal, analytical)
- How does the genre handle citations and references? (e.g. APA, MLA, Chicago)
- What are common phrases or terminology used in this genre? (e.g. “policy implications”)

### **Purpose and Function**

- How does this genre contribute to the broader field of study? (e.g. advancing knowledge)
- How does this genre address counterarguments or alternative perspectives (e.g. limitations)
- What are the expectations for originality and critical analysis in this genre? (e.g. independent thought, synthesis of existing research)

### **Practical Application**

- What are common challenges with writing in this genre? (e.g. maintaining objectivity)
- How do writers transition between sections or ideas? (e.g. clear topic sentences, signposting)
- What strategies can be used to ensure clarity and precision in this genre? (e.g. defining terms, avoiding unnecessary jargon)

## Evaluation

- What are common formats and where is this genre published or presented? (e.g. journals)
- What are the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the genres (e.g. relevance, argument)
- How can one assess the impact or influence of a piece written in this genre? (e.g., citation metrics, policy changes, academic recognition)

## More on rhetorical moves

Rhetorical moves are strategies that writers use to effectively communicate their ideas and achieve their purpose within the conventions of a specific genre. These moves help structure the text, engage the audience, and enhance the persuasiveness of the argument. By identifying these moves in genres in your program and field, you can better understand how to employ them in your own writing.

Rhetorical moves can include various elements such as introducing topics, making arguments, providing evidence, transitioning between sections, and concluding. They also involve the use of appeals—ethos (authority), pathos (emotion), and logos (reason)—to connect with the audience.

### Examples of rhetorical moves in academic writing:

#### Move: Establishing the importance of the topic

Example: “In recent years, the impact of technology on student learning has garnered significant attention due to the increasingly integration of digital tools in classrooms.”

#### Move: Presenting the research question or thesis statement

Example: “This study examines the relationship between digital learning platforms and student engagement, aiming to provide a comprehensive analysis of contributing factors.”

#### Move: Stating a clear argument

Example: “Data suggest that personalized learning technologies improve student outcomes. Students using adaptive software achieve higher test scores and greater motivation, indicating these tools enhance educational effectiveness.”

#### Move: Using transitional phrases to guide the reader

Example: “Building on the evidence presented in the previous section, this chapter explores the impact of digital tools on student collaboration and engagement”

**Move: Summarizing previous points before introducing new ones**

Example: “Having discussed the benefits of personalized learning, we now turn to the challenges of digital equity in education.”

**Move: Restating the main findings or arguments**

Example: “In summary, the study highlights the significant role of technology in enhancing student learning outcomes.”

**Move: Appeals to pathos (emotion)**

Example: “The transformative impact of technology can be seen in the increased enthusiasm and engagement of students in underserved communities.”

**Move: Appeals to logos (reason)**

Example: “Statistical analysis shows a direct correlation between the use of digital tools and improved student performance in standardized tests.”

# Applying Genre Awareness to Write

Applying genre awareness to writing involves translating your understanding of genre conventions into clear, structured academic work. This section details how to plan, draft, and revise your text effectively by defining your purpose, knowing your audience, and adhering to genre-specific norms, ensuring your writing meets academic standards and assignment expectations in your programs.

## Planning your writing

Understanding how to apply genre awareness to your writing can significantly enhance your ability to produce clear, effective, and scholarly work. This process involves leveraging your knowledge of genre conventions to structure, draft, and revise your texts in a way that aligns with academic standards and expectations. Here’s a step-by-step guide to help you apply genre awareness effectively to write:

### Understand the Genre’s Purpose and Objectives

#### Clarify the Genre’s Purpose

Each academic genre serves a distinct function. It is important to be clear on purpose. For example:

**Research Articles:** Aim to present original research findings, contribute to the body of knowledge, and engage with existing literature.

**Literature Reviews:** Seek to synthesize and critique the current state of research on a topic, identifying gaps and trends.

**Policy Memos:** Aim to provide concise and actionable recommendations based on evidence, tailored for decision-makers.

**Grant Proposals:** Focus on convincing reviewers of the significance and feasibility of a research project or initiative.

### ***Guiding Questions:***

- What is the objective of the genre? What are its primary goals as a genre?
- What is your specific purpose, and does it align with the genre?
- Is your purpose to persuade, inform, discuss, analyze, synthesize, describe, etc.?

### **Define your Objectives**

Once you understand the genre's purpose, refine your writing objectives:

**For Research Articles:** Ensure your objectives include clearly articulating the research problem, presenting methodologies, and discussing implications.

**For Literature Reviews:** Aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the research landscape, highlighting key debates and gaps.

**For Policy Memos:** Your objectives should be to outline the problem clearly, present viable policy options, and recommend specific actions.

**For Grant Proposals:** Focus on demonstrating the need for the project, detailing your plan, and showcasing the potential impact.

### ***Guiding Questions:***

- What are the key objectives of your writing? What are your specific goals?
- What should readers know or be able to do, for instance, after reading?
- Is there a clear connection between the purpose and objectives for writing?
- Do your objectives and purpose align with the core objectives of the genre?

### **Align Content with Genre Goals**

Tailor your content to meet the specific objectives of the genre. Consider:

**Relevance and Focus:** Ensure that each part of your text aligns with the genre's goals. For example, in a research article, each section should build towards presenting and discussing your research findings.

**Audience Needs:** Consider the needs and expectations of your target audience. For instance, policy memos should be accessible to policymakers who may not have specialized knowledge.

**Contribution to the Field:** Reflect on how your writing contributes to the field. For research articles, this means advancing knowledge; for literature reviews, it means providing clarity and insight into existing research.

### **Guiding Questions:**

- Who is your audience/readership and what are their purposes for reading?
- What do they need or expect from this genre?
- How and are you meeting those expectations and needs?
- What kind of work is your writing doing? (e.g. advancing knowledge, informing decisions)

### **Set Clear Writing Goals**

Based on the genre's purpose and your objectives, set specific goals for your writing process:

**Establish a thesis or Research Question:** For research articles, formulate a clear research question or hypothesis that drives your investigation.

**Outline Key Sections:** Determine which sections are crucial for achieving your objectives and how to present them effectively. For example, in a policy memo, prioritize the problem statement and recommendations.

**Ensure Coherence and Focus:** Make sure each section of your document contributes directly to your main objectives and maintains a clear focus. Avoid unnecessary or extraneous information.

### **Guiding Questions:**

- What are the key sections of this genre? Which sections are required?
- What are the goals and objectives of each section in your writing?
- What sections should you prioritize based on knowledge of the genre?

## **Outlining: Preparing to Write**

### **Develop a Hierarchical Outline**

Creating a detailed hierarchical outline is a crucial step in planning and organizing your academic writing. This outline will serve as a roadmap for your text, ensuring that your arguments are structured logically and that all necessary content is covered comprehensively.

### **Start with a Broad Structure**

Begin by drafting a high-level overview of your text. Identify the major sections or headings that will form the core of your document. For a policy memo, these might include:

- **Executive Summary**
- **Problem Statement**
- **Policy Options**
- **Recommendation**
- **Implementation Plan**
- **Conclusion**

## Break Down Each Section

For each major section, outline the key subsections and topics that need to be addressed. This helps you organize your thoughts and ensure that each part of your document fulfills its purpose.

Using a policy memo as an example, here's how you might break down each section:

- **Executive Summary**
  - Purpose of the Memo
  - Key Findings
  - Summary of Recommendations
- **Problem Statement**
  - Description of the Issue
  - Background and Context
  - Evidence of the Problem's Impact
- **Policy Options**
  - Option 1: Description, Pros and Cons, Feasibility
  - Option 2: Description, Pros and Cons, Feasibility
  - Option 3: Description, Pros and Cons, Feasibility
  - Comparison of Options
- **Recommendation**
  - Preferred Option
  - Rationale for Recommendation
  - Anticipated Outcomes and Benefits
- **Implementation Plan**
  - Steps for Implementation
  - Resources Required
  - Timeline
  - Potential Challenges and Solutions
- **Conclusion**
  - Recap of Key Points
  - Final Remarks on the Importance of the Recommendation
  - Call to Action (if applicable)

## Define Subsections in Detail

Within each subsection, specify the content and arguments that need to be included. This helps in maintaining a clear and logical flow.

For example, in the **Policy Options** section of a policy memo, you might detail:

- **Option 1**
  - Detailed Description of the Policy Option
  - Advantages and Disadvantages
  - Analysis of Feasibility and Implementation Issues
- **Option 2**
  - Detailed Description of the Policy Option
  - Advantages and Disadvantages
  - Analysis of Feasibility and Implementation Issues
- **Comparison of Options**
  - Summary Table Comparing Key Features of Each Option

- Discussion of Trade-offs and Potential Impacts

## Establish Relationships and Flow

Ensure that there is a logical progression between sections and subsections. Each part should build on the previous one, leading to a coherent overall argument.

For a policy memo, for instance:

- The **Executive Summary** provides a concise overview of the memo, setting up the reader to understand the **Problem Statement**.
- The **Policy Options** section follows, presenting various solutions to the problem.
- The **Recommendation** section should logically follow from the analysis of the policy options, providing a clear choice based on the previous discussion.
- The **Implementation Plan** should outline how the recommended policy will be put into action.

## Iterate and Refine

Your hierarchical outline is a living document. As you begin drafting, you might find that some sections need to be expanded or reorganized. Regularly revisit and update your outline to reflect these changes and ensure that your writing remains aligned with your objectives and genre conventions.

### Guiding Questions:

- What are the main components of each section?
- What specific information needs to be included in each subsection?
- How should these components logically flow from one to the next?
- Are there any gaps or redundancies in your outline that need addressing?

# Quick Tips for Strategic Reading

## 1. Identify Key Genre Features

- **Tip:** Focus on specific elements that define the genre, such as structure, style, and purpose.
- **Example:** For academic journal articles, look for sections like Abstract, Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion.

## 2. Analyze Purpose and Audience

- **Tip:** Understand the genre's primary purpose and intended audience to better grasp its conventions and the expectations of readers.
- **Example:** Research proposals aim to persuade funders by demonstrating significance and feasibility, targeting a specialized academic or funding body.

## 3. Examine Structural Patterns

- **Tip:** Observe common structural patterns and organization within the genre.
- **Example:** In policy memos, typical structures include an Executive Summary, Problem Statement, Policy Options, and Recommendations.

## 4. Note Language and Style

- **Tip:** Pay attention to language use, tone, and stylistic choices specific to the genre.
- **Example:** Technical reports often use formal, precise language and passive voice to emphasize data over the researcher's actions.

## 5. Review Genre-Specific Conventions

- **Tip:** Identify and learn the conventions and expectations specific to the genre.

- **Example:** Literature reviews often include a comprehensive synthesis of existing research, using thematic or chronological organization.
6. **Evaluate Evidence and Argumentation**
    - **Tip:** Analyze how evidence is used to support arguments and conclusions within the genre.
    - **Example:** In argumentative essays, assess how claims are substantiated with evidence and how counterarguments are addressed.
  7. **Compare Different Examples**
    - **Tip:** Read multiple examples within the genre to understand variations and commonalities.
    - **Example:** Comparing several grant proposals helps identify common elements like budget sections, goals, and methodology descriptions.
  8. **Consider Citation and Referencing Styles**
    - **Tip:** Note the citation practices and referencing styles typical of the genre.
    - **Example:** APA style is common in psychology and education research, while MLA is frequently used in humanities papers.
  9. **Assess the Use of Visuals**
    - **Tip:** Observe how and why visuals (tables, graphs, charts) are used in the genre.
    - **Example:** Business reports often use graphs to visually represent financial data or trends for clarity and impact.
  10. **Reflect on Genre Evolution**
    - **Tip:** Be aware of how genres evolve over time and how contemporary examples might differ from older ones.
    - **Example:** Modern policy briefs might include digital data visualizations, whereas older versions relied more heavily on textual descriptions.