Real Audience: Anyone who reads your argument.

   Example: teacher, classmate, tutor, friend

Intended Audience: The specific person or people the author actually wants to influence.

   Example: single men in their 30s who live in the Baltimore region

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Why is choosing an audience important?

We all have many ways of talking and writing--we can be formal or informal, concise or detailed, technical, specialized or general. Normally we choose a writing strategy based on who we think of as our reader. Knowing your audience before you write will make the process of writing easier because it simplifies the decisions you have to make. Writing with a specific audience in mind will also give your essay more unity of purpose and style and will involve your reader more directly in your argument.

How does choosing an audience affect the purpose?

If you don't have a particular intended audience in mind, or if you say that your essay is for "everybody" or "society" or "people interested in this topic," your writing will tend to be as general as your intention. Your real purpose will be (or seem to be) turning in an assignment to the teacher. On the other hand, if you see yourself as addressing a real reader, you will have a much clearer understanding of your purpose, and your reader will feel more involved.

How does choosing an audience affect the style, support, tone, or vocabulary?

Often you have to decide how formal or casual to make your essay. Knowing the intended audience, then, enables you to ask questions and make choices rather than following arbitrary rules. You will also have to decide how much and what kind of support to give for a point. The teacher may state a rule like "your term paper must contain at least ten sources," but the real question is what "support does the intended audience need?" Real-world writers think in these terms, not in terms of length or number of sources. You may also have to choose whether or not to define special terms; if you know your intended reader's level of expertise, this choice is much easier.

## How specific should my intended audience be?

The more specific your choices, the easier your argument will be. Generally, three to four demographic descriptors is a good place to start.

What does your audience believe?

Although you may belong to the same general group as your intended readers, it's often a mistake to assume that your readers already agree with you or knows the material you're trying to convey. If the readers agree totally with you, why do they need to read your statement? But if you assume that your readers are either uncommitted or leaning to the other side, then you will know from the start what and why to argue your point.

What factors about my audience should I consider when writing?

There is a fine line between relying on general patterns and stereotyping your audience. Think about the *intersections* between the various aspects of your audience's identity. The chart below shows several factors that might influence a person's beliefs, attitudes, and identity.
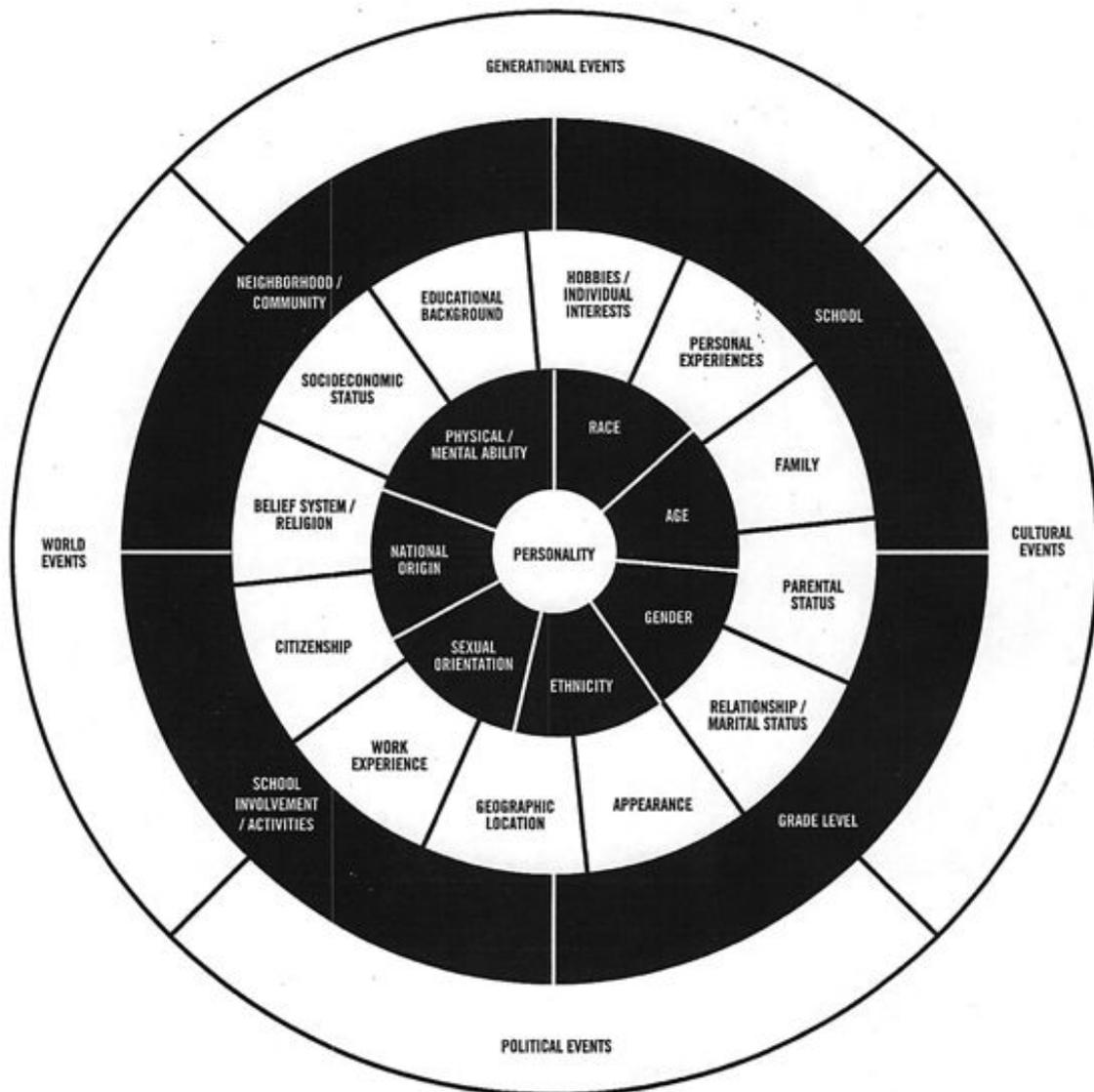
Adapted From: "Choosing and Writing for an Audience" by Dr. Steven Hale