

Author's Purpose

Before architects draft their blueprints, they need to understand the purpose of the proposed building. Are they designing a stadium to seat screaming spectators or a library for quiet study? This purpose drives every decision that architects make, from the layout of their buildings to the design. Like architects, writers carefully construct their stories and essays with a specific purpose in mind.

COMMON CORE

Included in this workshop:

RI 3 Analyze how an author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

RI 4 Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone. **RI 5** Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text. **RI 6** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

Part 1: Author's Purpose and Perspective

An **author's purpose** is what the writer hopes to achieve by crafting a particular work. Although a writer may have more than one purpose, usually one purpose stands out. A writer's purpose could be any of the following:

- to inform or explain
- to persuade
- to express thoughts or feelings
- to entertain

You can uncover an author's purpose by looking at the choices the writer made. Every choice—from the subject and the tone to the particular words and other **important details**—is a clue that can reveal the purpose. Another clue is your reaction to what you read. For instance, if you are convinced by an argument to fight for a cause, then the author's **central idea**, or main point, is probably that people should support that cause. Thus, the author's primary purpose is to persuade.

AUTHOR'S PURPOSE	CLUES IN THE WRITING
<p>TO INFORM OR EXPLAIN Examples: encyclopedia or magazine articles, documentaries, instruction manuals, warranties, Web sites</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facts and statistics • steps in a process • diagrams or illustrated explanations
<p>TO PERSUADE Examples: editorials, TV ads, political speeches</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a statement of opinion • supporting evidence • appeals to emotion • a call to action
<p>TO ENTERTAIN Examples: short stories, novels, plays, humorous essays, movies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suspenseful or exciting situations • humorous or fascinating details • intriguing characters
<p>TO EXPRESS THOUGHTS OR FEELINGS Examples: personal essays, poems, diaries, journals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thoughtful descriptions • insightful observations • the writer's personal feelings

MODEL 1: TO INFORM OR EXPLAIN

Writing that informs or explains typically leaves you feeling more knowledgeable. As you read this article, look for clues that suggest its purpose.



from **WEB MASTERS**
Nonfiction article by **Joe Bower**

Spiderwebs are flexible yet strong, ultrasensitive, adaptable to different settings, and able to span great distances (compared with the size of their makers). They perform a variety of impressive functions, the most obvious of which is capturing prey.

- 5 Not all of the world’s estimated 37,000 known spider species make webs. In fact, arachnologists categorize spiders based on this ability. Tarantulas and jumping spiders belong to the large group that doesn’t make webs. Instead, these **arachnids**, which are sometimes referred to as wandering spiders, stalk or ambush their prey.

Close Read

1. Which words and phrases suggest that this is an informative article? One word has been **boxed**.
2. Identify one other important detail that suggests the author’s purpose is to inform or explain. How does this detail advance the author’s purpose?

MODEL 2: TO EXPRESS THOUGHTS OR FEELINGS

This essay also focuses on spiders, but the writer includes minimal facts. How do the details, the language, and the writer’s tone help you understand her feelings about spiders?

from *Weaving*
THE WORLD
Personal essay by **Janisse Ray**

Every night the spiders weave the world back together. This morning I see webs whole again, **shining freshly gossamer in the new sun**, webs we tore down last night accidentally, setting up the tent on the platform. All day paddling, we have been watching for them—zippers and bananas and crabs, **colorful and intriguing**.

- 5 They are everywhere, stitching leaves to trees, and trees to shrubs, and shrubs to ground. . . .

The spiders have adapted to their fragility, their vulnerability; when we humans bungle into their webs, they scurry off, up a single thread into a sweet bay. They have no new technologies, no new economies. Across the prairies they spin and spin, as they have done for thousands of years, **holding this outrageously glorious world together**.

10

Close Read

1. Examine the **boxed** details that the writer uses to describe spiders and their webs. How do these details differ from those in “Web Masters”?
2. Is the writer’s attitude toward spiders admiring or matter-of-fact? Support your answer.

RECOGNIZING AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Even if they have similar purposes, no two writers will approach a topic in the same way. Their perspectives influence what they write and how they write it. An **author's perspective** is the lens through which a writer looks at a topic. This lens is colored by the writer's experiences, values, and feelings.

Consider the two excerpts on the previous page. Factual articles, such as “Web Masters,” usually don't reveal a writer's viewpoint. However, literary essays, such as “Weaving the World,” include clues that convey an author's perspective. Even though the author of “Weaving the World” includes *some* factual information, personal examples and opinions play a greater role in her description. Notice how the following clues reveal a writer who appreciates nature.

- **Word Choice** Words and phrases such as “colorful and intriguing” and “vulnerability” reveal the writer's fascination with the wonders of nature.
- **Tone** A writer's **tone** is his or her attitude toward a subject. The writer does not focus on spiders' creepy qualities. Her tone is admiring, not fearful.

Part 2: Organization and Format

To achieve their purpose, writers of both literary and expository nonfiction choose particular patterns of organization, such as **cause-effect** and **classification**. Recognizing these patterns can help you determine an author's purpose, locate information, and understand the connections between ideas. Here are two common patterns.

CHRONOLOGICAL

What It Does

- Describes events in time order

Why Writers Use It

- To explain a sequence of events in an easy-to-follow way
- To tell a suspenseful or exciting story

How to Recognize It

- Look for signal words such as *before*, *finally*, *first*, *next*, and *then*.

COMPARISON-CONTRAST

What It Does

- Highlights similarities and differences between two or more subjects

Why Writers Use It

- To show the benefits of one subject over another
- To compare an unfamiliar subject with a familiar one

How to Recognize It

- Look for signal words such as *also*, *and*, *but*, *in contrast*, *unlike*, and *while*.

In addition to these patterns, nonfiction writers use **text features** to help you understand a topic. Imagine a scientific article without **subheadings**, **captions**, and **boldfaced type** to guide you. Who wouldn't be confused?

MODEL: CLASSIFICATION ORGANIZATION

In this scientific article, the writer uses classification organization to group information by common characteristics. As you read, think about how this organization, with the help of the text features, helps you digest the information.

from
Germ Warfare

Nonfiction article

The human body is built to fight off germs, and its first line of defense is skin. Along with other natural barriers, skin blocks out germs so they can't get to us. The few pathogens that do make it inside the body must fight it out with the immune system.

FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE

5 **TEARS** Tears constantly wash away foreign objects. They contain their own antibiotic, an enzyme called lysozyme, which kills bacteria.

10 **MUCOUS MEMBRANES** Mucous membranes line the inside walls of the organs and tubes that open to the outside of the body. They produce sticky mucus that traps germs much as flypaper traps flies.

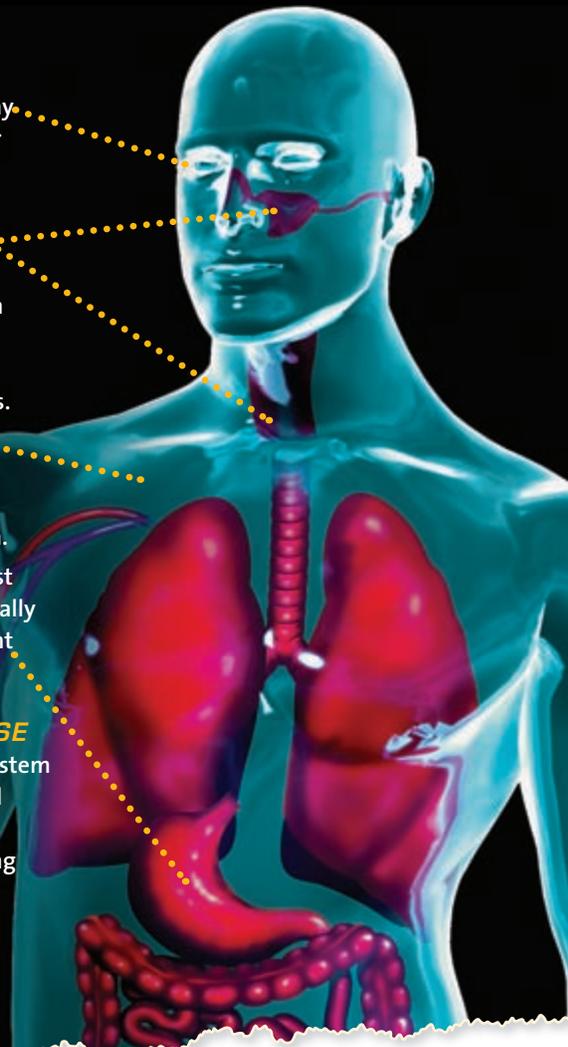
15 **SKIN** Few germs can penetrate unbroken skin. However, they do work their way in through cuts or openings like the nose and mouth.

20 **STOMACH** The acids used to digest food are so strong that germs usually cannot survive. Most germs caught in mucus end up here and die.

SECOND LINE OF DEFENSE

25 **IMMUNE SYSTEM** The immune system is a group of cells in the blood and lymph (a bodily fluid). Those cells specialize in finding and destroying tiny invaders.

(1) An invader enters the body. Several types of white blood cells
 30 move to attack. . .

**Close Read**

1. Into what two main categories is the information grouped? Explain how you can tell.
2. Notice the boldfaced words used throughout the article. Two have been boxed. What purpose do they serve?
3. What does the information in the annotated diagram add to your understanding of mucous membranes?

Part 3: Compare Texts

What happens when lightning strikes an airplane? Both of the following excerpts answer this question, but their similarities end there. As you read, use what you have just learned about clues—details, tone, and choice of words—to determine each author’s purpose and perspective.

from **Aha Moment**

Essay by **Julia Alvarez**

I was in the tiny bathroom in the back of the plane when I felt the slamming jolt, then the horrible swerve that threw me against the door. Oh Lord, I thought, this is it! Somehow I managed to unbolt the door and scramble out. The flight attendants, already strapped in, waved wildly for me to sit down. **As I lunged ahead toward my seat, passengers looked up at me with the stricken expression of creatures who know they are about to die.**

“I think we got hit by lightning,” the girl in the seat next to mine said. She was from a small town in east Texas, and this was only her second time on an airplane. She had won a trip to England by competing in a high school geography bee and was supposed to make a connecting flight when we landed in Newark.

In the next seat, at the window, sat a young businessman who had been confidently working. Now he looked worried—something that really worries me: when confident-looking businessmen look worried. The laptop was put away. “Something’s not right,” he said.

The pilot’s voice came over the speaker. I heard vaguely through my fear, “Engine number two . . . hit . . . emergency landing . . . New Orleans.” When he was done, the voice of a flight attendant came on, reminding us of the emergency procedures she had reviewed before takeoff. **Of course I never paid attention to this drill, always figuring that if we ever got to the point where we needed to use life jackets, I would have already died of terror.**

Now we began a roller-coaster ride through the thunderclouds. I was ready to faint, but when I saw the face of the girl next to me I pulled myself together. I reached for her hand and reassured her that we were going to make it. “What a story you’re going to tell when you get home!” I said. “After this, London’s going to seem like small potatoes.”

Close Read

1. Reread the **boxed** details. Is Alvarez reporting “just the facts” or is she sharing personal impressions as well? Explain the intended effect of these details.
2. Although Alvarez describes a frightening experience, her tone is not fearful. Identify the tone and three details that convey it.
3. Do you think Alvarez’s primary purpose is to persuade, to entertain, to inform, or to express thoughts and feelings? What important details from the essay advance this purpose?
4. Consider the descriptions in lines 1–3 and 19–21, as well as Alvarez’s tone. What can you infer about her perspective?

Now read this article, and compare it to Alvarez’s dramatic account.
Use the clues in the text to identify the author’s purpose and perspective.

Aircraft Built to Shrug Off Lightning Strike

Newspaper article by **Tom McNamee**

Lightning strikes airplanes now and again, but seldom with tragic results.

In a typical year, lightning
5 causes only a handful of aircraft accidents in the United States, and occasionally none at all. From 1983 through 1995, 29 accidents resulted in 37 deaths. But a 30th
10 accident proved the exception. On Aug. 2, 1985, lightning struck a Lockheed L-1011 as it came in for a landing at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, slamming
15 the jet to the ground and killing 137 passengers.

One witness on the ground, an aviation weather expert, recalled seeing “lightning from cloud to
20 cloud.” Another witness said the plane exploded even before crashing into “just a big ball of fire.”

A Plane’s Built-in Protection

As a rule, however, the laws of nature favor aircraft in a collision
25 with lightning. Lightning’s electrical charge usually spreads across the entire outer skin of the craft, robbing it of its concentrated power, before it is shed like rainwater.

30 The metallic skin of some aircraft is ideal for conducting and diluting an electrical charge. And planes with skins made of lighter-weight composite materials, such as



The most common areas for lightning to strike a plane include the wing tips and the fuselage nose.

35 graphite, are commonly fitted with an underlying metal mesh to collect and route the charge. . . .

Aircraft Size and Condition

As a rule, larger planes are least threatened by lightning, said Donald
40 Kemp, retired chief of accident investigations for the Federal Aviation Administration. Larger aircraft have more surface area to absorb lightning’s electrical charge, and they are fitted with pencil-like
45 “shedders” on the back of the wings to collect and “bleed off” electricity.

“If a plane is in proper condition, you shouldn’t have a problem,”
50 Kemp said.

Close Read

1. How do the boxed details in this article differ from those in “Aha Moment”?
2. Identify two text features that the writer uses. What information do these features convey?
3. What is the author’s purpose? Describe two clues that helped you determine that purpose.
4. Consider the writer’s tone and the details in this article. Do they tell you anything about the writer’s perspective? Explain your answer.