KINDS OF WRITING

Good writing begins with a decision as to what type of composition is best for the project at hand. Some initial considerations are

* What is the purpose of writing: to entertain, to convey information, to explain a process, to argue a point, or to continue a relationship?
* What is the material to be expressed: a story or anecdote, your personal thoughts and opinions, facts, information, issues, or interpretation of a text?
* Who is your audience: a personal friend, the public at large, a teacher, or a select group of some kind?

If you have been given an assignment, you will need to make sure that you begin by answering these three basic questions, as you would if you were choosing the assignment or topic yourself. Most English classes will assign themes or essays that require more than one kind of writing.

The answers to these questions will help you to decide whether you will be writing formally or informally. Formal writing is carefully organized in order to facilitate the reader’s understanding. Formal writing is hard on the writer but easy on the reader. Informal writing is more spontaneous and relies on the relationship between the writer and the reader to facilitate understanding. The more difficult the material, the more formal the writing; the closer the audience to the writer, the more informal.

Compositions can be further understood by looking at the modes of writing. Few documents belong to a single mode, but good writers are aware of the primary mode in which they are working. Generally, the purpose, material, and audience will determine the primary mode that is best for expression.

Modes of Writing

* Description - primarily constructs a visual impression of a scene, person, or event
* Narration - tells a story, or a series of related events
* Reporting - relays information or news including the five W’s - who, what, where, when, why
* Exposition - explains, interprets, or analyzes a subject
* Argument - raises and addresses issues relating to a subject

For example, the how-to booklet included with your new video camera is formally written and almost purely expository, though a little description is also necessary. Short stories and novels are usually narrative with varying amounts of description. An editorial in a newspaper is primarily argument with some reporting and exposition included in order to lay the foundation for the writer’s position on the issues. Typical interpretive themes or essays will be almost entirely expository, with varying degrees of argument.

Knowledge of these factors will facilitate every writing project.
**Review:** List the five modes of writing and explain the distinct characteristics of each one.