

Determining Author's Purpose

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

author's purpose: the reason(s) an author has for writing the work

Step 1: Learn common purposes. Keep the four common author purposes in mind as you read:

- to explain or inform
- to persuade
- to entertain
- to express emotion and ideas

Step 2: Identify clues to author's purpose. Look for clues in the work's title, subject, and tone; the choice of words; the context, or intended audience; the effects on the reader; and the **structure**. There are some common match-ups between text structure and purpose, but no firm rules.

EXAMPLE

Sequence, cause-effect, or main idea and details are often used to explain or to inform.

Problem-solution, proposition-support, or compare-contrast order may signal that the author's purpose is to persuade.

Chronological order, is often used in dramatic histories or storytelling and may signal that the purpose is to entertain.

Order of degree or spatial order may be used to express emotion.

Step 3: Infer the author's main purpose. Review the clues and recall the common purposes. Decide what is *most likely* the author's main purpose. Check your answer by ruling out the other purposes.

Step 4: Use purpose to understand and evaluate work. Use the author's purpose to guide how you read. Take notes, or jot down arguments or opinions. Evaluate the piece in light of the author's purpose: How well did the passage achieve the goal? How well were you entertained, informed, persuaded, or instructed?

EXAMPLE: AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

Do you know what crustaceans are? They are a large group of arthropods, many of whom live in water. They have an external skeleton made of protein and chitin. Crabs, lobsters, and shrimp are a few familiar examples. Less familiar examples are wood lice and barnacles.