

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

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PROMPT

Assignment 6: Audience and Purpose

Using the assigned excerpts, respond to the following prompts with a unified, three-paragraph essay (2-3 pages).

Paragraph 1: How is the argument in Rowan William's first text suited to its purpose?

Paragraph 2: Compare the first text with the second text. Given that the texts share a purpose, how has the change in audience affected the arguments made by the author?

Paragraph 3: Drawing on analyses in parts 1 and 2 make a thoughtful argument about what are in general the benefits and costs of adapting your argument to your audience.

As the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury, one would likely assume belief in God is simply part of the job, and he or she would be correct in doing so. However, a misconception would be that another part of the job is the possession of a foolproof "argument that will prove once and for all that there really is a God" or at least the belief that he possesses such an argument.¹ In his work, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, Rowan Williams takes a very interesting approach to the existence of God, namely that there is presently no complete argument for God's existence. Although, from the title of his work, one might ascertain that the work's intended audience is people that do not know a great deal about Christianity. The content of the excerpt seems to be addressed to current believers and those already practicing Christianity. In a sense, however, the intended audience is in fact those uneducated about Christianity, and open to receiving this information through Christians. The purpose of Williams's writing is to reach those that do not follow Christianity through the Church's members. The content of this excerpt is primarily apologetics that Christians may read and use in defense of the religion. One of the primary arguments

made against Christianity is that there is no sound argument for God's existence and, therefore, no sound argument for practicing Christianity. Additional arguments against Christianity are that the Bible is considered proof of God's existence and people believe in religion because it makes them feel better. By providing the reader with the information that "the Scott Bible has no argument for the existence of God" and that "the Bible [is not] full of comfortable and assuring things," by presenting his direct audience, likely primarily Christians, with responses to objections that are often not properly responded to, Williams is succeeding in fulfilling his writing's purpose, which is introducing the reality of Christianity to those that do not practice or truly know it. ² Williams realizes that, because his audience is not the demographic that would likely read his book he presents it to those that would read it, thus allowing his message to reach his target audience. In presenting his argument this way, he demonstrates a great deal of awareness regarding his audience.

There is an obvious shift in audience between the first and second excerpt. The first excerpt is targeted at a more mature audience, while the second is addressed to a six-year-old girl, Lulu. Although Williams shifts his style of writing, he does not sacrifice content in order to allow Lulu to understand. Rather than "dumbing down" his writing, he simplifies the presentation while still covering a rather heavy topic. While maintaining the same purpose between the two excerpts, to address the existence of God, Williams demonstrates his mastery of the topic by being able to write on the subject using both complex and simple wording. He is able to portray the same idea for different audiences. For example, "they [Abraham, Moses and St Paul] are already caught up in something the imperative reality of which they can't deny or ignore."³ That quote is an eloquent way to say "Nobody invented me...they invented ideas about me...from time to time I sent them hints."⁴ These two quotes are both saying that nobody invented God, but one may discover God's existence through experience. Although he presents the ideas in a different style, the ideas that make up Williams's argument do not change, regardless of his audience. The essence of both excerpts is there is presently no definitive argument for God's existence and that is not a death sentence for religion. However, he insists one can still know that God exists whether he writes it as: "you have to see that

the very angst and struggle [one brings] to [his or her] relation with God is itself a kind of argument for God”, or he writes it as “They discovered me when they looked round at the world and thought it was... really mysterious and wondered where it came from.”⁵ The message is the same regardless of its presentation.

Adapting one’s argument based on the audience that will receive the information is critical. When one is constructing any form of argument, one of the most important factors to consider is the audience. If a student were to draft his or her paper for a college level English course in the same manner that he or she would send a text message to a good friend, the argument being made will be dismissed. On the other hand, if an author is writing an elementary school textbook but fills it with college level information, the arguments will be lost because the audience is not capable of comprehending it. As Rowan Williams demonstrated, it is possible to take a topic and deliver it in a different manner depending on the audience. Not only will it be beneficial to the audience, because they will be better able to understand the given argument, the person arguing practices mastery of the topic by being able to present it at any level. In conclusion, it is absolutely necessary to adapt one’s argument to his or her audience.

NOTES

1. Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust* (Canterbury Press, 2007), 20.
2. Ibid., 21.
3. Ibid., 21.
4. Rowan Williams, *Letter to Lulu* (Canterbury Press, 2011), accessed March 17, 2017.
5. Williams, *Tokens of Trust*, 21; Williams, *Letter to Lulu*.