In this course you will be asked to write multiple papers which explain important issues to a lay audience. For example, can you explain why scientists believe in the Big Bang? Your goal is not to convince your professor you understand, it’s to put into writing the answer so that anyone, especially someone important, would get it. If, when you leave Aggieland, you become a Senator will you need to be able to answer these questions so your fellow Senators can understand. This document is designed specifically for you to help you do this job better. Our experience is that the people who follow these guidelines are the ones who get the A's in this class.

**Audience Analysis: Why consider audience?**
Writers who fail to understand their readers may also fail to reach their goals. Their writing may seem unfocused or inappropriate. It is important to provide the context, tone, and language suitable to the audience you are addressing. It is also important to know your audience because it will help you determine how and what to write.

**Who will ultimately read your work?** While in the university classroom, your audience is often your instructor; however, some assignments are designed so that you are also writing to a secondary audience, for example, to an expert in your field or to the general public. Your instructor may designate an audience, or you may have to imagine one that you feel is most appropriate for your topic or thesis. Even when your audience is your instructor, you have to tailor your writing to meet expectations. Your instructor may expect you to demonstrate knowledge or critical thinking or to write in a certain style.

**How does an analysis of audience affect my writing?** When you tailor your writing to a specific audience, you also tailor features of the text. Audience affects the following:

- Your message (What do readers care about? What are they likely to act upon?)
- Your argument (What would be convincing? What kinds of evidence are normally used for this type of reader?)
- Your word choice (Should you use jargon/slang or formal/professional language?)
- Your sentence length or type (Can you use fragments? Long, complex patterns or short simple ones, or a combination?)
- Your tone (Is it personal, friendly, distanced, humorous, serious?)

Together, these elements constitute your style. Style should be adjusted appropriately to your audience.

**Considering Audience in the Writing Process**
You should consider audience early in the writing process, but not necessarily as the first step. The more you know about your audience, the better you can tailor your message. However, thinking too much about accommodating an audience can inhibit you. Try doing some prewriting and research first. When you are confident that you are knowledgeable about your topic and have something to say about it, consider how to make it interesting.
and significant for specific readers. Below are some questions you might consider in an audience analysis:

- **How much does the audience know about your subject?**
  Gulf Coast fishermen might know a great deal about saltwater fishing regulations, but might not be receptive to an intellectual, academic tone. Chemistry professors would probably know little about saltwater fishing, but would expect a more restrained, academic approach. Level and type of knowledge determines how much background or history you will have to provide, what terms might need definition or explanation, and whether to use an academic or familiar tone.

- **How does the audience feel about your subject?**
  Are they indifferent? Do they need to be convinced? Your paper may have to engage indifferent readers and convince them that your topic has some merit. If the audience is biased against your view, you'll have to find ways to argue effectively for your position. For example, citing some common ground between your beliefs and theirs might be one place to start.

- **What new information can you provide for readers?**
  Why is what you are saying valuable to your readers? What can they take away from your paper? Can you motivate them to think more about your issue?

- **What is your relationship to the audience?**
  Are you an equal, an authority, or a subordinate? Are you giving orders, suggestions, or friendly advice? You might be more colloquial or personal with a peer and more distant and careful with a subordinate. As an authority, you'll want to sound sure of yourself; a peer or subordinate might be more tentative or suggestive.

**The Nuts and Bolts of Tone**

In considering your audience, you should not only consider the amount and type of content to include, but you should also consider point of view, word choice, and sentence structure to achieve your intended tone.

**Point of View**

- **First Person Point of View**—the use of the word “I” in the text. The first person point of view personalizes the text. It can be appropriate in informal documents or personal statements.
- **Second Person Point of View**—the use of the word “you” in a text. This point of view directly addresses the reader and is only appropriate in very informal communications or in “how-to” types of documents. Even if you do not use the word “you,” you may be using second person point of view. For example, many manuals are written in second person point of view, but they do not use the word “you.”
- **Third Person Point of View**—the use of the word “he,” “she,” or “they” in a text. Third person is the most formal point of view and is the point of view most often used in formal essays and journal articles. Some students find the third person point of view to be difficult to use because of a) the tendency to use sexist language; and 2) the tendency to commit pronoun/antecedent agreement errors.

Example:

The *student* must be chosen carefully. *They* must be willing to sit quietly for long periods of time. (Incorrect)

*Students* must be chosen carefully. *They* must be willing to sit quietly for long periods of time. (Correct)
Although the error could be corrected by using he or she, usually the smoothest way to correct the error is to convert the noun into its plural form.

Brevity—Cut the Fat
Perhaps the easiest way to eliminate (or prevent) grammar errors is to make writing as crisp and concise as possible. “Write tight,” journalism professors have told their students for years. But writers sometimes heed a natural instinct to bloat their writing. As writers inflate the complexity of their writing, however, they risk making more grammatical errors and obfuscating meaning.

To be sure, concise writing isn’t easy. The Mark Twain quote above is testimony to that fact. But there are some tell-tale signs of sloppy writing, and it is important to identify the deadwood that should be eliminated. As writers cut out the excess, they likely will eliminate grammatical mistakes. The end product will be more fluid and readable.

Meaningless thoughts and ideas in writing are tough enough, but taken with cloudy words and trite phrases, they spell disaster. Here are some examples of fluff, adapted from the handbook for the Dow Jones Center for Editing Excellence at the University Of Texas School Of Journalism.

--Redundant Words

- advance planning = planning
- cooperated together = cooperated
- future predictions = predictions
- major breakthrough = breakthrough
- resemble in appearance = resemble
- close proximity = proximity
- first priority = priority
- initial prototype = prototype
- necessary requirement = requirement

--Adjectives and Qualifiers

Beware the adjective and its friends very and really. This statement does not serve to prohibit adjectives, but it is a reminder that writers must be judicious in their use and even more discriminating when considering the use of qualifiers such as very. A banana can be yellow, and a writer should have no reservation about writing that it is. But he or she should avoid writing that bananas are yellow in color. And certainly don’t call it an elongated fruit that is yellow in color.

The phrase very unique is a troublesome example of what can go wrong when putting qualifiers with adjectives. To be unique means to be one of a kind — it is a binary state, and something either is or is not unique. There are no degrees of uniqueness, so to describe something as unique means to declare no others like it exist. The use of the adjective alone is a burdensome decision — what if you’re wrong? To put very in front of unique defies the very definition of the word (pun intended).

--Eliminate Unnecessary Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases certainly have their proper place in the written language, but one way for writers to cut the fat in writing is to identify the prepositional phrases in their work and see if the phrases can be reduced to a word or two.