

Purpose - Tutor Hints

Successful reading involves critical thinking. This involves analyzing, interpreting, and making fair judgments or inferences about the information that is being presented. When reading critically, pay close attention and try to determine the author's *purpose*.

Purpose: Authors write with a reason in mind, and you can better understand their ideas by figuring out what that reason is. The three most common purposes for writing are...

To inform - These sentences or passages are designed to deliver information, and that is all. No other purpose is evident. The author wishes to provide facts that will explain or teach something to readers. He or she will use descriptions, facts, and history, details, and explanations to provide this information.

To persuade - The author is trying to convince you to do something or believe his/her point of view. He or she is trying to change your opinions by appealing to your emotions or intellect. If you are good at distinguishing opinions from facts, you will find that *persuasive* reading selections usually contain opinions.

To entertain - the author is trying to be funny or exciting, but nothing more. He or she is trying to provide pleasure or amusement through light reading. Sometimes, the author may not be very good at entertaining, but you should still be able to see that purpose in his or her writing.

Note: All passages will contain some kind of information, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the author's purpose is to inform. How is the author employing the information, or for what purpose? Some informative passages might contain a little bit of persuasion or perhaps a hint of entertainment; remember to focus on the primary purpose.

Practice: What is the author's purpose in the following selections.

1. Many people in my family are seafood eaters; when they see food, they eat it.
2. About 14,000 ocean-going ships pass through the Panama Canal each year, averaging to about three ships per day.
3. Congress should focus its attention on passing laws to protect children from the spread of pornography in the Internet.
4. The differences between complaints and personal attacks are simple. In a complaint, a wife states specifically what is upsetting her, and criticizes her husband's *action*, not her husband, saying how she felt when it happened: "When you forgot to pick up my clothes at the cleaners, it felt like you don't care about me." It is an expression of basic emotional intelligence: assertive, not belligerent or passive. But in a personal attack, she uses the specific grievance to target her husband himself: "What is your problem? You're always so selfish and uncaring. It just proves I can't trust you to do anything right." This kind of criticism leaves the person on the receiving end feeling assaulted and possibly belittled. Such an attack on someone's ego is very likely to lead to a similar response, rather than an attempt to improve behavior.

Purpose:

1. Enterprise

2. Inform

3. Persuade