

## LUC WRITING CENTER – “WRITING FOR ‘THE UNINFORMED READER’”

Who would you say reads your essay? First, **you** as writer, editor, and reviser. Usually, **your classmates**, who may peer review or give you advice about the quality of your writing. Finally, **your teacher**, who must read, critique, and grade your essay.

Question: Though they perform different tasks related to your writing, what do these people have in common? Answer: *They were in your classroom and read/discussed the same course material, and your awareness of this circumstance can lead to serious writing issues with content and clarity.*

**PROBLEM:** You, as the student, know that your reader is likely one of the people from your classroom, that is, an “**informed reader.**” Because you may write based on this knowledge, leaving out important details that you all already know, also means that your essay is **hard to understand** for a reader outside of this classroom context. You could write sentences like this in your topic paragraph that would make no sense to readers who were not informed of your course content and materials: *“King Jr. employed many kinds of rhetoric in his famous essay to convince people to support his mission.”*

This leaves a reader *who is not a member of your classroom* with many questions: “Who is King Jr.? What kinds of rhetoric? What famous essay? Who were these people? What was his mission?”

**SOLUTION:** If you want to craft an excellent, thorough essay that could even be published, you must write for an audience unfamiliar with the course material – that is, the “**uninformed reader.**” In other words, *pretend that your reader knows nothing about your subject.* Even though your teacher knows the material already, he or she will be delighted that you are writing as if you were trying to publish your essay, providing information about the author, historical situation, genre, issue, etc. that forms the subject of your essay. Most of this informative material will appear in your topic paragraph, where you will write sentences such as,

*“While incarcerated in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963 for peacefully protesting racial inequality, civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. employed many kinds of rhetoric such as ethos, pathos, and logos, in his famous essay “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” to convince local white ministers to support his peaceful mission to achieve rights for African-Americans.”*

### **Why Writing for the ‘Uninformed Reader’ Works:**

- If you *assume your reader knows nothing about your topic*, you will by necessity **include background details, details about the author, and clear explanations that otherwise would be missing from your essay.**
- You can **use and publish your work even after finishing the class.**
- Links to essay **competitions, conferences, and undergraduate publications (interdisciplinary and discipline-specific)** can be found on [the Loyola OWL](#).