

WIN 5.2 - Developing an Inclusive Writing Style

Lesson 3 - Audience and Inclusion

Audience

I think the first step in writing is to identify your audience, because writing is communication, and you're not communicating in a vacuum; you're communicating to another person who has a different background from you, who has different experiences, different cultural reference points, possibly a different first language. So it's very important to identify who it is that you're communicating to because you really need to tailor the message to that person or that group of people.

For example, if I were giving a presentation to a group of managers, or a group of administrators my tone, my language, my jokes (if I were to tell any), my references - would be very, very different than if I were going to speak to a class of university or college students. Or if I were speaking to a colleague. So I think whoever you are writing for, you need to really think about having that person understand, using the language, using the references, using things that they will understand.

Inclusion

The most important things about inclusive writing are to first of all keep in mind that not everybody has your background, whether that's your educational background, your lived experiences, your cultural background. Not everybody is going to read what you've written with the same lens that you bring to it. So it's important to really think about who it is that you're writing for, and try to be as open and inclusive and clear as possible. It's important to avoid making references or jokes that other people might find offensive, or that other people might not understand. To use references that are inclusive of all audiences so that as many people as possible will be able to understand what you've written. And it's important not to make any assumptions about your audience, whether that's assumptions of race, of class, of gender, of sexual identity, and to really try to avoid excluding or possibly offending anybody that might have different values, beliefs, language, culture than yourself.