

### Referencing the author's purpose

Whenever you're asked to answer questions about a reading passage, it's likely that at least one of those questions will ask you to discuss the purpose of the passage.

You'll first need to determine the author's purpose:

- There are three main types of purpose:
  - **Persuade:** the author's purpose is to persuade the reader to consider his or her perspective on a specific topic. The author will present opinions, evaluative statements, as well as facts and statistics to support their argument.
  - **Inform:** the author's purpose is to inform the reader about a specific topic. The writer will present factual information, observations, and perhaps the opinions of experts as a way of verifying the information.
  - **Entertain:** the author's purpose is to entertain the reader.
- Keep in mind that authors might combine the elements of the different purposes. For example, an author might use an entertaining story or anecdote as an example to support his or her claims in a persuasive piece of writing. An author might create a very persuasive and informative piece of writing that was simply meant to entertain. You'll need to think about the reading passage as a whole: what is the message the author is trying to communicate?

Now that you've determined the purpose of the reading passage, you'll need to explain what that purpose is: this means going beyond writing "the purpose of the passage is to persuade the reader" or "to entertain" or "to inform." You'll need to get specific.

- The purpose of the passage is to **persuade** WHO to do WHAT and WHY
  - Example: The purpose of the passage is to persuade voters to attend informational meetings, so they'll understand the issues and be better prepared to vote.
- The purpose of the passage is to **inform** WHO about WHAT and WHY
  - Example: The purpose of the passage is to inform campers about the nature of fire regimes, so that campers understand the various stages of plant growth that occur afterward and affect the scenery.
- The purpose of the passage is to **entertain** WHOM by doing WHAT, HOW is that entertaining?
  - Example: the purpose of the passage is to entertain the reader by making imaginative inferences about a man the narrator claims to have read about in the newspaper. The author thinks it is entertaining to guess what other people's lives are like, and thinks the reader will agree.

Finally, you'll want to back up your purpose statement by pointing to one or two examples from the passage.

- **Persuade:** to find support when the purpose is to persuade you'll want to look for appeals to the audience, statements that encourage the reader to act on the information in the passage, or statements where the author takes a stance on the topic.
- **Inform:** to find support when the purpose is to inform the reader, you might want to point out that the author didn't present any personal opinions, or that the author didn't attempt to persuade the audience. You can also look for any observations or conclusions the author makes about the subject.
- **Entertain:** to find support when the purpose is to entertain, you'll want to look at the descriptions and interactions. It's true that even fiction writing can attempt to persuade and inform the reader, but remember that you're trying to prove that it's meant to be entertainment. Look for anything that is humorous, eye-catching, interesting, or even startling.