

CSC: CoR: Chapter 2: Connecting with Your Reader

The 10 salient sentence strings presented below are lifted from the chapter as is, without modification (except, perhaps, for a bit of punctuation here or there). They are presented in order of appearance in the chapter.

Ten Salient Sentence Strings

1. When you read a book or a scientific paper, you silently converse with its writers—and through them with everyone else they have read. In fact, every time you go to a written source for information, you join a conversation between writers and readers that began more than five thousand years ago. And when you report your own research, you add your voice and can hope that other voices will respond to you, so that you can in turn respond to them.
2. We can judge how well a conversation is going as we have it, and we can adjust our roles and behavior to repair mistakes and misunderstandings as they occur. But writing is an *imagined* conversation. Once we decide what role to play and what role to assign our readers, those roles are fixed.
3. Of course, judgments go both ways: just as readers judge writers, so writers also judge readers, but they do so before they write.
4. In fact, writers can't avoid creating some role for themselves and their readers, planned or not. So those roles are worth thinking about from the beginning, before you write a word. If you ignore or miscast your readers, you'll leave so many traces of that mistake in your early drafts that you won't easily fix them in the final one.
5. Since few people read formal research papers for entertainment, you have to create a relationship that encourages them to see why it's in their interest to read yours.
6. Down the road, you'll be expected to find (or create) a community of readers who not only share an interest in your topic (or can be convinced to), but also have questions about it that you can answer. But even if you don't have that audience right now, you must write as if you do. You must present yourself as interested in, even enthusiastic about, wanting to share something new, because the interest you show in your work roughly predicts the interest your reader will take in it.
7. You take a step toward more significant research when you can say to readers not just *Here are some facts that should interest you*, but *These facts will help you do something to solve a problem you care about*.
8. To make your report credible, however, you must use the right terminology, cite the right sources, find and present the right evidence, all in the right format. But most important, you have to design your report around a specific *intention* that defines your role: to advise a decision maker on what to do to solve a problem. That kind of research is typical in the world at large but is less common in academic research than the next one.
9. You establish your side of the relationship with your readers when you adopt one of those three roles—*I have information for you; I can help you fix a problem; I can help you understand something better*. You must, however, cast your readers in a complementary role by offering them a social contract: *I'll play my part if you play yours*.

10. You are concerned with your *particular* community of readers, with *their* interests and expectations, with improving *their* understanding, based on the best evidence you can find. That's the social contract that all researchers must establish with their readers.