

Name of the Game: Mind the GAP (Genre, Audience, Purpose)

Timing: Writers benefit from playing this game as they begin conceptualizing new projects. It's at this moment, long before drafting begins, that they determine what they want to say, who they want to say it to, and what forms their writing could take.

Goal: This game is intended to help players choose meaningful purposes and audiences for their work in addition to an appropriate genre. As they consider the turning points they've experienced in their own lives and the important lessons learned as a result, potential topics begin to emerge. After they've refined their purpose and topic, they will enter into a second round of play which will enable them to identify an audience. The third and final round will help them determine the most appropriate genre.

Number of Players: 1-3 per team

Duration of the Game: Three rounds of play completed in 40 minutes

Materials Needed: Board or chart, sticky notes, pens, optional prompts (see variations, below)

How to Play:

1. Every player begins by drawing a 3x3 matrix on their board or chart and labeling the axis as I have here:

	Self	Others	Self+Others
Relevant			<i>It's important to have a purpose</i> <i>It's important to have an audience</i>
Less Relevant	<i>It's important to have a purpose</i>		

2. Round one begins as each player creates a timeline of turning points in their own lives.

3. Next, writers reflect on the lessons that were learned from each experience on their timeline, creating one sticky note for each lesson learned.

4. Writers place their sticky notes on their matrixes by considering which of the lessons learned from their past experiences remain relevant to them alone, to others alone, or to them and others now.

5. Once writers have completed their matrixes, the second round of play begins. Acting as reviewers, players will move in carousel fashion and explore the ideas generated by their peers.

6. Reviewers will indicate which ideas possess personal relevance by placing stars on the appropriate sticky notes. Then, they will brainstorm other potential audiences that the writer may not have considered, adding them to the matrix accordingly.

7. When writers return to their original matrixes, they will use the findings shared by their peers to refine their purposes and determine their audiences, keeping in mind that an ideal purpose is one that is both satisfying to the writer and relevant to others.

8. As round three begins, players will write their purpose and audience at the top of a blank sheet of paper, chart, or on a white board.

9. Acting as reviewers, writers will move in carousel fashion from one chart to the next, considering each player's purpose and audience and then brainstorming potential genres, which they will record below the stated purpose and audience.

Variations:

A. If writers struggle to define turning points, they may spend some time reflecting on the prompts like the following orally or through freewriting:

Describe a time when your life changed because you:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| *Said yes or no | *Listened to your heart or your head |
| *Stayed or left | *Spoke up or remained silent |
| *Played big or small | *Risked something or played it safe |
| *Agreed or disagreed | *Loved someone or remained distant |
| *Kept something or gave it away | *Won or lost |

B. Rather than inviting reviewers to list all potential audiences at once in step 6, players could one idea at a time in rounds. This would prevent any one player from dominating idea generation and creating a list so lengthy that others struggle to contribute.

C. Writers could share their matrixes in other settings and invite people other than these initial players to contribute to their ideas.

D. Once writers determine their purposes, audiences, and genres, they could archive remaining ideas in their writer's notebooks for potential use in the future.

E. As writers complete step 9, some may produce ideas that are far more thoughtful than others. In order to encourage quality idea generation, invite writers to move beyond merely naming a genre. Challenge them to share specific ideas about the form that each piece could take. In the example below, the writer has chosen to describe lessons learned from the loss of his grandmother, and his intended audience is other writers his age. Rather than suggesting that he write a story, the reviewer has suggested that he write a story about his own experiences, calling upon himself as the main character.

Rules of Interaction:

1. The game is played in silence, and writers may not qualify or defend their choices.

2. The teacher should let it be known that the intention of the game is to generate as many ideas as possible, and that since writers are not required to act on the ideas shared with them, they should move through the game quickly wasting little time debating with others or defending their ideas.

3. Writers must wait until others have finished recording their ideas within a set space before they begin adding their own.