# BUILDING AUDIENCE PERSONAS

Whether you're writing a book or running a company, having a strong understanding of your audience is key. However, learning about and truly understanding an audience is one of the hardest tasks for brands.

It's difficult to take a step back and make an unbiased analysis of your audience, whether because you feel you already know them well, business is going well, or you're not sure where to start. But having a strong understanding of the people on the receiving end of all of your communication will make you a more agile brand, able to adapt when those people's interests and needs inevitably shift.

It's not enough to feel like you know your audience. Creating fleshed-out audience personas is the best way to prove that you do. Follow the four steps below, and you'll be well on your way.

## RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

If you've been in your industry for a while, this stage will likely be a breeze. But no matter how well you feel you know your industry and your customers, don't skip it.

Focus your research efforts into the following two categories.

## Primary Research

Primary research is defined as new research, conducted by you. This should include a detailed analysis of your current customers/readers. Who is buying your product? Has that shifted over time? Does that line up with who is visiting your website, reading your social media? Pull what data you're able to from your own resources and closely analyze your current audience.

What you choose to hone in on will be dependent on your brand. If you run a women's retail company, gender is a given. But how old are your customers? Do they tend to live in certain regions?

Also take a look at what your competitors are doing. Create a document outlining the tone, types of content, and avenues they use to reach readers. Tools like Spyfu, Ahrefs, or Semrush can be a big help here to know which keywords competitors are using. Don't spend too much time unpacking this data yet. Until you've compiled all your research, you won't know whether you should be speaking to an audience similar to that of your competitors or not.

You could also use AI as a tool during this stage to better understand your audience's pain points. Large language models such as ChatGPT and Claude can quickly comb through large volumes of text to find patterns in audience behavior. By using AI to analyze Reddit threads, reviews, and comment sections for recurring trends and themes, you can get a deeper understanding of your audience's challenges, which is an important step in building out your audience personas.

## Secondary Research

Take advantage of the already existing research out there. The Pew Research Center has an overwhelming amount of information that can help you dive deeper into understanding your audience. Pay attention to articles that relate to your specific industry that may shed light on more broad consumer behavior.

For instance, working in the publishing industry, I'm constantly aware of the discussion around ebooks. Are they growing in popularity? Declining? Pew research shows that while the overall popularity of ebooks and audiobooks has gone up in recent years, the majority of American readers

still favor print books over digital ones. That said, audiobooks and ebooks are more widely used than in previous years, especially among Americans under fifty, aided by apps like Spotify adding audiobooks to their platform and apps like Libro.fm and Libby allowing readers to support libraries and local bookshops with their digital reading. This, along with a great deal of other research, comes together to help us paint a picture of our readers.[1]

## UNDERSTAND YOUR IMPACT

With a clear understanding of your existing customer/reader base, as well as the larger industry-wide research, you can now start to carve out your place in the industry. But rather than focus on what makes you different from your competitors right now, instead try to answer the following questions:

- What problem am I solving?
- What value do I add to my customers?
- What impact do I have on their lives?

Customers don't just buy products—they buy the transformation that the product offers. When you understand your answers to these questions, you will be better able to understand for whom that transformation matters and speak to them as if in response to their particular pain points and wants.

## CREATE AUDIENCE PERSONAS

Create a range of personas that fit your understanding of your audience. Give the person you've envisioned a name, and use the data you've collected to fill in their interests, goals, and pain points. Don't just focus on their history, but instead try to imagine both their day-to-day frustrations and where they will be in a year, five years, etc.

1 William Bishop, "Americans Still Opt for Print Books over Digital or Audio Versions; Few Are in Book Clubs," Pew Research Center, April 9, 2026, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/04/09/americans-still-opt-for-print-books-over-digital-or-audio-versions-few-are-in-book-clubs/.

Personas don't need to be limited to one or two people. You may only have a small handful of primary target customers, but there may be opportunities to engage secondary personas in smaller ways. Keep in mind that not every persona serves the same function. While one may be your target customer, another may be a key influencer. Getting in front of the influencer may be the key to unlocking customers.

## SPEAK TO THEM ALWAYS

Once you've zeroed in on your top four to five personas, write to them in the way that you imagine they'd speak. The simplest way to connect with your audience is to give them content that they'd find relevant and to use a tone that feels familiar.

Before writing or speaking in any setting, consider which of your specific personas you're talking to now. Who is going to get the most from this content? What do you want them to do when they've received it? Use every piece of communication as an opportunity to crawl into the head of your audience and learn more about them.

The last piece of the puzzle is, of course, more data. Once you've written the content, don't just assume you've hit the nail on the head. Use whatever data you can find—reader demographics, page views, downloads, etc.—to learn if you've succeeded or need to keep tweaking your strategy.

The most important thing to keep in mind when discovering your audience is that humans are complex. So while you may only need to do this process once in great detail, you should consider it an ongoing affair. Your audience will shift and change over time, and it's up to you to shift and change along with them.

On the following page is an example of a possible audience persona for someone writing on the topic of autoimmune diseases in teens. Notice the level of detail. Try to replace the information with your specific audience.

## Primary Target

### The Concerned Mother

Laura is 45 years old and works part-time as a paralegal at a family law firm. After 6 years of cooking for their two daughters, it is important to Laura and her husband to prepare healthful foods to prevent the onset of ailments. When a family member does become ill, they try to trace any symptoms to triggers, such as stress or other environmental factors, rather than just suppressing the symptoms.

While Laura typically gets her news online, she prefers print for reading at length. Laura's age and gender group exhibits more interest in health and medicine, and she is no exception, seeking out books to learn more about staying healthy.

PAIN POINT: Now that both of Laura's girls are growing up, she is growing concerned about her eldest daughter, now 16 years old, who has been experiencing severe joint pain and fatigue. Given her legal background, Laura has an affinity for conducting in-depth research and considering the pros and cons of any position. She has been reading up on autoimmune disorders and other possible causes of inflammation. Laura favors natural approaches to treating her daughter but isn't quite sure where to turn for well-researched and trustworthy information on her options.

Has been married for 20 years and has two teenage girls

Lives in Indianapolis, Indiana

Values trustworthy sources of information and watches videos by Dr. Mark Hyman and Peter Attia on Facebook and Instagram

Has a paralegal studies associate degree

Reads articles online by *Women's Health* and *Good Housekeeping*