Workshop 3
Different Audiences

*"Getting kids to think about how audience changes their purpose, changes how they write,
and changes the actual words they'll use on the page, is absolutely critical."*

—Kylene Beers, Ed.D., Yale University, New Haven Connecticut

Introduction

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and retired professor of English Donald M. Murray writes about having a reader over his shoulder as he writes—a persona who nudges him along as he gets his words on paper. Many writers acknowledge having such an audience while composing, often a composite of real or fictional presences that guide them during the early stages of writing.

Other experienced writers such as Judith Ortiz Cofer are less consciously aware of audience. Cofer suggests that she internalizes her audience and then forgets about it; experience has made audience envisionment such an imbedded part of her process that it operates in the background.

Inexperienced writers often completely neglect consideration of audience. They may just be caught up in the complexities of getting their words on paper and unable to think of anything else. They may lack experience writing for authentic audiences if all they have ever known is writing papers to be read and graded by their teachers. In the effective writing classroom, helping students consider the audience toward which they are directing their words should be a central focus of instruction.

Video Overview

In this video, teachers talk about the importance of audience in their own writing and how they help student writers understand audience and its implications. Often—both for the teachers and their students—the self is the initial audience they consider as they jot notes and gather ideas for a piece of writing. These initial stages of writing are often fragmented and self-rhythmed, and frequently change from one project to the next.

Gradually, as a piece begins to take shape, writers benefit from receiving feedback from others. This gives them a sense of the effects their words and ideas have on readers, helping them see where they may have gone off track, or where they might need further exemplification.

The teachers in this video have developed a number of strategies to help students understand the importance of audience. They ask students to analyze newspaper and magazine articles to determine how the material is shaped for a particular readership. They ask students to rewrite a piece for a very different audience. They ask students to role-play as writers for publications with distinct readerships and then craft short articles with content and style targeted to that audience. This classroom activity mirrors the teacher's own work in a writer's workshop, led by distinguished author Judith Ortiz Cofer.

When students leave their English classes for other disciplines, the audiences for which they write (and the conventions demanded by those audiences) change. History and social studies teachers may be more interested in the factual presentation of cause and effect and less intrigued by descriptive detail. In science writing, where the focus is on events that occur under certain circumstances, passive voice appropriately shifts the focus from agent to agency. Students need to learn to adjust their writing for a range of different disciplinary audiences and, often, it is up to English teachers to help them delineate and meet these different demands. As an example, this video presents a project shared by science, English, and technology teachers that helps students learn about meeting audience expectations in diverse disciplines.

Key Points

- Teaching students to consider audience—and the way different audiences affect what and how they write—is central to the curriculum of the writing classroom.

- Often, the first audience writers address is themselves. Many experienced writers jot notes to themselves to keep track of their emerging ideas and worry about organizing them for an audience at a later time. Other writers see audience identification as the first step they must take in the processes of writing.

- Broadening the audience for students so that they understand that they are not just writing for the teacher is important in the writing classroom. Creating assignments explicitly directed to authentic audiences (parents, editors of local papers) is one way to do this. Having students share their work with peers is another.

- By analyzing professionally published pieces, students begin to see how content, language, and sentence structure all contribute to creating an appeal to a particular audience.

- Getting feedback from others helps students understand what is effective about their writing in the eyes of different audiences.

- Different academic areas have different conventions for writing. Students need to learn that writing for an audience in English class may be very different from writing for audiences in disciplines such as social studies, science, or mathematics.

- Offering students multiple opportunities to write for many different audiences helps them prepare for the many different kinds of writing experiences they will have after they leave high school.

Learning Objectives

After participating in this session, you will be able to:

- Help students analyze the intended audience for their own writing and for published texts,

- Find ways to broaden the audience in your classroom so students are not simply writing something for you to read and grade,

- Develop writing experiences that lead students to address a variety of different audiences,

- Consider ways to help students learn to write effectively in a number of academic settings other than English class, and

- Help students understand that writing processes are recursive, inconsistent, and changeable depending on the particular contexts in which they occur.

The Classrooms in This Video

- Joan Cone, Ph.D., 9th grade. El Cerrito High School, El Cerrito, California

- Charles Ellenbogen, 11th and 12th grade. Baltimore City College High School, Baltimore, Maryland

- Susie Lebryk-Chao, 12th grade. Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia

- Lori Mayo, 9th grade. Far Rockaway High School, Queens, New York

- Dennis McFaden, 9th grade. Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia

- Barbara Nelson, 9th grade. Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia

- Kelly Quintero, 11th grade. Huntington High School, Long Island, New York

Featured Voices in the Conversation

- Kylene Beers
- Lucy Calkins
- Judith Ortiz Cofer
- Margo Jefferson
- Maxine Hong Kingston
- Tracy Mack
- Ruthanne Lum McCunn

Background Reading

"Examining High School and College Writing Expectations." *The Council Chronicle*, May 2003, National Council of Teachers of English. This article is included in the Appendix of this guide.

Optional: For additional resources, visit the *Developing Writers* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop. Select Workshop 3 and Additional Resources.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready (30 minutes)

Discuss

Discuss the following questions:

> **Facilitator:** Use the questions below to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the questions in their workshop journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few.

- How do you define the term "audience"? What does it mean to you as a writer and a teacher of writers?

- For what kinds of audiences do you write? For what kinds of audiences do your students write?

Reflect in Workshop Journals

In these workshop journals, you are typically your own audience. How would your writing change if you knew this writing would be read (and perhaps evaluated) by an administrator? By a trusted friend or relative? Outline or jot down a few thoughts about the ways in which a change in audience might affect your work.

Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

Watch and Discuss

Questions to think about and discuss as you watch the video:

Pause at the title card "Different Styles for Different Audiences." This follows a section on the effect of peer audiences on student writing.

- What audiences make writing difficult for you? What audiences are easy to write for? Why?

- During which processes of writing should students consider their audience? When might it be inhibiting to do so? When is it absolutely necessary?

- What parts of writing (voice, style, diction, etc.) change when you consider audience? Which factors do not change regardless of audience?

> **Facilitator:** If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated below to give participants opportunities to discuss, reflect, and interact with the program. If needed, rewind and replay segments of the program so that viewers can thoughtfully examine all pertinent information. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, ask participants to consider the questions as they view the program and discuss them later.
>
> You may select any or all of the questions below to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants. Encourage participants to respond to the questions they didn't have time to discuss as a group in their journals or on Channel-Talk.

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

- How do you broaden the audience for your students so they are not just writing to you, the teacher who will evaluate their work?

- What changes have you observed in student writing when young writers know that their work will be read by their peers? Why do you think these changes occur?

- What strategies that you saw demonstrated in the video would you like to adopt for use in your own classroom? Why do you think they would work well with your students?

- What questions or concerns come to mind as you watch the video?

View program until the end.

- What do students learn about audience by writing personal profiles of their classmates, as they did in the video? How can you build on this experience to help them address other, more remote audiences in their writing?

- What kinds of audiences will your students be expected to address in their writing beyond high school? What specific activities can help these young writers meet the expectations of the business and academic worlds in which they will function?

- What do you tell your students about audience that they can use to help them write for audiences in disciplines other than English?

- What do students learn by becoming more proficient writers?

- What strategies that you saw demonstrated in the video would you like to adopt for use in your own classroom? Why do you think they would work well with your students?

- What questions or concerns come to mind as you watch the video?

Going Further (30 minutes)

Pretend you have to write a letter to the parents of your students explaining why you have decided not to put letter grades on every completed piece of writing, but to use a portfolio method of evaluation instead. Spend five minutes creating a draft of your letter.

In groups of four or five, share your drafts by reading them aloud. Then discuss how your intended audience determined the details you included and the language you used to express your ideas. Share individual discussions with the entire workshop group.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

Journal

In your workshop journal, identify one or two key concepts regarding audience that you would like to teach your students. List and describe some activities that you might offer to teach those concepts.

You may also want to address any remaining questions from this session that you did not have time to discuss, as well as thoughts, questions, and discoveries from the workshop itself and learning experiences that take place in your own classroom.

Reading

In preparation for the next session, read the Background Reading for Workshop 4: Deborah M. Dean. "Muddying Boundaries: Mixing Genres with Five Paragraphs." *English Journal*. September, 2000 53-56. This article is available in the Appendix of this guide.

Optional: For additional resources on topics discussed in this session, visit the *Developing Writers* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop. Select Workshop 3 and Additional Resources.

Teacher Tools

The following Teacher Tools are included in this guide for your use in planning classroom activities:

- Audiences Near and Far
- Analyzing Audience
- What Would You Tell Them? Different Details for Different Audiences
- Using Print Ads To Identify Audiences

Ongoing Activities

Channel-Talk

Send comments and questions regarding the workshop to other participants around the country with Channel-Talk. Consider sharing ideas that came up as you wrote in your journal, questions you did not have time to discuss in this session, and experiences from your classroom.

The Web Site

Go online for materials and resources to deepen your understanding and implementation of the practices shown in the workshop.

Between Sessions (On Your Own), cont'd.

The Classroom Connection

Student Activities

Try these activities with your students.

- In Their Shoes: Have students in groups role-play one or more of the following scenarios:

  Scenario A:
  A coach telling his or her former star player that a rookie is starting in the next game instead.

  A coach telling the parent of his or her former star player that a rookie is starting in the next game instead.

  Scenario B:
  A teacher telling a student that he or she has failed an exam and will have to retake it.

  A teacher telling the student's parent that the student will have to retake a failed exam.

  Scenario C:
  A young driver telling a parent that he or she has put a dent in the fender of the family car.

  A husband telling his wife that he has put a dent in the fender of the family car.

  A wife telling her husband that she has put a dent in the fender of the family car.

After students have talked through the situation(s), ask them to capture the essence of their role-playing experience by writing a short dialogue. Together, talk about ways in which an awareness of audience shaped their responses.

- Asking Questions: As you work with literature in the classroom, ask students to identify the audience for which the piece was written and to explain how they know this. Presenting questions like these can help students begin to read as writers, analyzing the details of the work that makes it important to a specific audience.

- Audience Expectations: When students write creatively and personally, they can often ignore the demands of an audience other than themselves. But certain assignments they face have more explicit audiences whose expectations factor heavily in the conception and creation of the work of writing. Chief among these are the evaluators who will assess writing completed on high-stakes assessments, college admissions personnel, and the like. Talk with your students about the elements these audiences find necessary to have in a written work. How do their requirements differ from or resemble those shared by a personal audience or a peer audience? Are their expectations different from your own? How can you best help them analyze and meet the needs of these differing audiences?

- Writing Across the Curriculum: Although writing across the curriculum can involve several partners in many disciplines, you can also structure these kinds of opportunities within your classroom.

  - Obtain style guides from different scholastic organizations (such as the Modern Language Association or the Council of Biology Editors) and businesses such as television stations to expose students to the expectations of different audiences. Compare these guides to see how they each address key issues in writing. How are the different? The same?

  - Draw proposed topics for essays from subjects being explored in social studies, science, mathematics, or other disciplines. Ask the students to complete two drafts of essays that contain the same thesis: one draft would be for English class and the other would be for the class in which the subject is being explored. Ask student groups to compare these paired essays. How do they differ? How are they the same?

Between Sessions (On Your Own), cont'd.

Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner

- Review some of the writing activities you typically offer your students. Experiment with redesigning one or two to help students consider audience more specifically.

- Make a list of authentic audiences for student writing. Design one or two assignments that will meet these audiences' needs and expectations.

Notes