

Chapter 1: The Issue of Audience

1.1 Introduction

Of the many aspects of writing that most good writers attend to, audience is the least attended to in composition classrooms. The de facto audience is the professor herself, attempting to stand in for the many possible audiences for whom students might write. The professor does not necessarily prove to be a good audience as students try to give her what they believe they want: a grammatically perfect and conventional paper. Students have been exposed to years of writing for this “audience as evaluator.” Statewide educational testing usually includes a writing component which, in order to be easily graded, must follow very strict conventions, such as having a certain number of sentences per paragraph or using a certain average word length. Even the SAT now contains a writing component. Thomas Newkirk, for example, explains that it appears that the five-paragraph format reigns supreme. Further, he suggests that the kinds of questions and topics presented to students to write about will lead them to the “land of platitudes” (22). The NCTE criticizes the test, saying that it “dramatically narrows’ the scope of writing for students” (5). The timed essay, they said, “could promote formulaic writing among students” (5).

When students come to college, then, these are the scripts they have in their heads: the five paragraph theme on steroids. Writing instructors at the college level attempt to get them beyond this conventional approach. One of the ways of doing that is to encourage them to consider their audience, to write for someone. However, the instructor often does not provide much more instruction than that and he does nothing to provide an actual external audience. In lieu of the external audience, there have been

several ways of approaching the issue of audience. The first involves audience analysis, which, under traditional rhetoric, would require analyzing an actual audience. Because of the absence of an actual audience, however, many have shifted to teaching invention of audience, creating a completely fictional audience for any given piece of writing. More recently, an approach to audience audience has become more complex, involving a combination of invention and analysis and recognizing that our audiences are often multiple and not singular and monolithic.

In the age of the Internet, an external audience is much more readily available than it once was and can provide that “real” audience that is missing from the writing classroom. Further, that audience can be allowed to interact with the writing, providing feedback on its effect, allowing students to then modify their writing to be more effective. In a sense this closes the transactional loop, giving the students an idea of how readers respond to their work. Writing for the web challenges our notion of audience while bringing us back to some work on issues such as audience analysis. Writing for the web gives students the external audience that might be analyzed, but the concept of audience, if anything, is more complex than ever, engaging with many of the concepts of the last forty years of study on the subject and adding in new layers of complexity. Below, I outline some of the paths researchers have followed in regard to audience and the implications for writing for the web. I will suggest that blogging offers different opportunities for addressing audience in the classroom than writing for the web. Blogging complicates approaches to audience in ways that early writing for the web does not.

1.2 Addressing audience

Many composition instructors have agreed that not having an authentic external audience is problematic in many writing classes because it creates an artificial writing environment. Richard Braddock, back in 1965, explained that the problem stems from “artificial context of writing themes every week for a grade” (165). Even earlier than that, Jeffrey Fleece claims that “teachers have recognized that writing in a vacuum is almost bound to be bad” (272). Towards the end of their explication of a new audience-response model for teaching writing, Mitchell and Taylor state: “Only in composition courses are human beings forced to write on fake topics for a fake audience” (267). And, commenting on attempts to shift student writing from writer-based to reader-based through various strategies, Lisa Ede suggests that teachers “cannot alter the artificiality of the classroom” (“On Audience” 294). All of these suggest that writing in the composition classroom is inauthentic, often done for the sole purpose of achieving a good grade. Russell Long points out that this approach often leads to equating “successful writing with successful proofreading” (221). James Britton, in his study of the development of writing abilities explained that 95% of all the writing studied fell into the category of writing for the teacher. Though this category was further subdivided so that some students viewed the teacher not as just an evaluator, Britton wrote that “the conventions of [teacher as examiner] audience may be a severe restriction upon a young writer” (127). Cognitive research, too, suggests that a lack of understanding on the part of the student of their audience leads to weak writing. Barritt and Kroll explain that latent egocentrism in students leads them to focus on the self and local issues and that students are unable to see other points of view (54). Likewise, Flowers and Hayes suggest that

poor writers may have skills to turn out a good paper, but because they “turn the rhetorical situation into a paper-writing problem” and focus primarily on such surface issues as page length, their writing remains weak (101). They have not fully considered the situation, including who their audience is; they resort to writing for the teacher.

What composition instructors cannot agree on is the solution to the problem. Early essays addressing the lack of an external audience suggest having students write for publication. Donald Stewart required his students to submit at least one essay for publication using *The Writer's Market* to help them find appropriate places for publication (36). Similarly, Marvin Magalaner suggests publishing in more local newspapers or magazines, writing letters to the editor, for example (104). What's missing from this approach is appropriate feedback. Though the teacher may certainly guide students through the process, focusing on issues related to publication rather than evaluating the writing simply as an assignment, it may be a long time before students hear back from an editor. The suggested remedy for this problem has been to have the other students provide this feedback. Richard Braddock suggests having the student writers “seek out from among his classmates . . . some who disagree with his proposal, and he must discover the reasons for their opposition” (167). The end result of this approach, he asserts is that students “become conscious of what is involved in thinking deliberately and, as they reveal their thinking in their writing, to help them shape their ideas into clearer and more responsible communication” (169). Maurice Brown describes a similar approach, placing more emphasis on “turning freshmen into teachers of composition” (263). In one class, he created groups that critiqued each other's papers and

he assigned grades for that critique, encouraging the critics to be honest in their assessment. Though peer review has become common in composition classrooms, it is not without its problems and it doesn't completely solve the problem of providing an external audience. Peers sometimes become complacent and as, Jeffrey Fleece explains, peer review can create “a different kind of artificial situation” (272). He recommends instead that teachers respond more like “real” audiences, in ways that “guarantee the student's continued confidence in [the teacher's] interest” (273). While there has certainly been work done on moderating teacher comments in ways that respond to writing in ways that are more readerly than teacherly, this approach could just as easily slide back into the original problem of teacher as audience that we're trying to solve in the first place.¹

This approach of having students write for publication, a supposed external audience, finds its roots in traditional rhetoric. In traditional rhetoric, a rhetor would have a physical audience to address. Teachers using a rhetorical approach map the writing act onto the speech act. There are several problems in this approach. There is, as I have suggested above, for those teachers trying to create an audience to address in the form of writing for publication, the practical consideration of a lack of feedback. But there are also more theoretical and practical problems with the traditional rhetorical approach. Both Barry Kroll and Russell Long point out that most writing within this approach is persuasive in nature and that this sets up an adversarial relationship between the writer and the reader (Kroll 174; Long 222). Kroll demonstrates the problem this creates for student writers in an example of student writing that is a persuasive essay on

¹ See especially Sommers, Nancy. “Responding to Student Writing.” *College Composition and Communication* 33:2 (1982). 148-156.

animal trapping. The student very obviously addresses his reader as someone who is opposed to animal trapping. There is no subtlety in his argument. His opening paragraph ends, "Let me tell you why their [those that oppose me] arguments are unsound" (173). Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford argue that the problem with such writing is that its focus is too much on success in terms of convincing the audience of the writer's point of view. They explain that focusing on success can be exclusionary: "Most deeply suppressed in the persistent gesture toward success, with its accompanying silent embrace of sameness, is a concomitant inattention to issues of difference" (174). Others have also raised the issue of sameness and stereotyping of the audience. As Kroll explains that "the writer often has only a vague and quite general conception of who the readers of a piece of writing will be" (174), and Long notes that attempts at defining an audience can lead to "noxious stereotyping" because the underlying premise of determining an audience is "that observable physical or occupational characteristics are unvaryingly accurate guides to attitudes and perceptions and that people sharing certain superficial qualities are alike in all other respects" (223).

Still, there has been a search for an approach in integrates audience more fully into the writing process. In "The Integrating Perspective: An Audience-Response Model for Writing," Mitchell and Taylor explicate a model for writing that emphasizes the multiplicity of audiences available for students. Theirs is a model that takes "audience addressed" to its extreme. As they say, "all writing is directed towards an audience" (25). Their model attempts to remedy the "writing for the English teacher" mode that many students fall into and which teachers in other disciplines find problematic. To do so, they

suggest not having English or composition classes, but providing instruction “when the student needs it to fulfill course assignments” (267). Not only would this help students adjust their writing to the appropriate audience, it would also alleviate the problem of instructors in other disciplines who “assume that spelling and such written product features constitute writing skill” (268). Thus, there will be some education in order for these instructors to evaluate differently. As they say, “If writing is produced for a specific audience, that audience can evaluate it” (270). While there is much to applaud in the framing of this model, especially their determination, for example, to study “an interaction, a dynamic relationship [between writer and audience], with all the complexities that involves,” the final articulation of how their model could be put to use is impractical at best. Lunsford and Ede argue that their argument places too much emphasis on the audience, granting it too much control over the writing. The audience, they say, controls both motivation and evaluation. In some ways, they are right, for Mitchell and Taylor suggest that, aside from creative writing, writers only write when called to do so by being given some kind of assignment (250-1). This dismisses the internal impetus that some may have to write (not in creative sense), even without a call by an external entity to do so. Further, Lunsford and Ede suggest that a focus on audience addressed which asks students to “modify their work with reference to their audience” can become “pandering to the crowd” (82). Certainly, one can see this as a distinct problem in political speech, especially, where politicians give audiences what they want to hear, most of which isn't at all substantive. In many other rhetorical situations, including perhaps, the English classroom, such an approach leads to

pandering. In fact, the impetus for audience consideration comes, in part, from the student's focus primarily on giving the teacher what he or she seems to want.

1.3 Inventing audience

The way out of some of the issues of the rhetorical approach is, for some, to invent one. Walter Ong famously stated that audience is “always a fiction” created during the writing process. The writer invents the audience or the reader from his imagination and the future reader of the writer's work imagines his or her role in part determined by whatever role the author has cast for him or her (60). Though Long thinks Ong's approach has merit, he argues that the practical application in the classroom is problematic. He explains a process of analyzing texts for their audience cues, showing how an author must “present specific pieces of information and establish certain connections or relationships among them [and] . . . create a satisfactory role for the reader” (225). Then, instead of asking students to simply consider who their audience is, he asks them to consider who they want their audience to be (225). Lisa Ede, in “On Audience and Composition” describes a similar strategy, having her students write up a complete description of their imagined audience when they turn in their papers. She gives them questions to consider as guidelines, but otherwise, they are free to envision any audience they like (295). In “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked,” Lunsford and Ede point out some of the problems with simply asking students to construct or invoke an audience. They note that such a view makes too much of a distinction between speech and writing, that sometimes in writing there are real audiences to address and that writers can and should attempt to analyze them (87-88). Further, they argue that it

“overemphasizes the power of the writer” (88). To think that readers don't bring anything to the text is an oversimplification of what happens in the reading process (88).

1.4 Half address/half invented

At the end of “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked,” Lunsford and Ede offer an approach that lies somewhere between considering the audience as something addressed and as something wholly invented. “Writers may,” they write, “analyze . . . readers' needs, anticipate their biases, even defer to their wishes. But it is only through the text . . . that writers embody or give life to their conception of the reader” (90). Fred Pfister and Joanne Petrick suggest a similar combined approach: “[Students] must construct in the imagination an audience that is as nearly a replica as is possible of those many readers who actually exist in the world of reality and who are reading the writer's words” (214). In other words, it's fine to invent an audience, but it must be a fairly realistic one. Pfister and Petrick provided for their students a detailed heuristic for analyzing audience and a series of step-by-step assignments that took them through phases of audience consideration, beginning with audience as teacher and ending with an audience appropriate for their paper topics (217-219). The results were that students had more detailed descriptions of their audiences which made them feel more at ease writing (219). Like Pfister and Petrick, Park in “Analyzing Audiences” argues that invention of an audience needs to attend also to real audiences: “it seems clear that all discourse must in some fashion attend to the constraints imposed by the requirements of real audiences” (486). At the end of the article, he broadens the problem from analyzing audience to defining writing situations (486). He suggests, as many have, having hypothetical

situations, but he says, “the only way to have an audience analyzable in the detail we usually envision . . . is to have a situation for writing that includes a concrete setting for ‘publication’” (487). However, he points out that many teachers do not necessarily want to provide such real audiences since it may limit the kinds of writing their students do. Instead, he argues for paying more attention to the social functions of writing and for doing more to describe writing conventions.

Research into the cognitive processes at work when writers compose also shows the importance of a thorough understanding of audience. As Flowers and Hayes point out in “The Cognition of Discovery,” novice and expert writers approach audience very differently. Novice writers “never moved beyond the sketchy, conventional representation of audience” while the better writers added “to their image of the audience” as they composed, creating a more detailed and vivid image of who their reader might be. Berkenkotter's study of expert writers showed much the same results. She shows, too, that consideration of audience is closely related to type of discourse. Those writers who chose to write a personal narrative considered audience less than those who chose to use a more persuasive or informative approach (392). Still, they considered audience more than novice writers. One reason for this lack of consideration of audience may be due in part to latent egocentrism, the continued focus on the self. Barritt and Kroll explain that there is a relationship between egocentrism and spoken communication and consider that Vigotsky and Piaget's work in this area may have implications for written communication (54-55).

1.5 Audience as social and multiple

While cognitive approaches to writing instruction demonstrate that more experienced writers consider their audience in detail, such an approach still focuses primarily on an internal view of audience. That is, the writer is still in some ways constructing an audience even if he or she has experience with “real” audiences. To complicate this perception of audience and to return, in some ways, to earlier conceptions of an addressed audience, recent researchers have been calling for a recognition of audience as a multiplicity of readers and for writing as a social activity. Though these researchers advocate a consideration of real, physical audiences, they advocate for something more complex than earlier researchers who called for an audience to address. Many of these earlier views on audience expressed above figure the audience as something monolithic and knowable or at least definable. However, many researchers now suggest that we must recognize that this is never the case. As Thomlinson shows in her explication of the review process, even three reviewers can have divergently differing ideologies, bringing such different issues to the text as to create conflict (cited in Reiff). Mary Reiff explains that earlier discussions of audience have created dichotomies that researchers have tried to resolve too neatly. Ede and Lunsford, for example, create the dichotomy of audience addressed and audience invoked. Though they want to complicate the dichotomy, they end up placing emphasis on the invoked audience by granting the writer more power in the composing process (Reiff). Reiff also explains that those who use the discourse community as an audience, create different problems. To suggest that “the roles of writer and reader neatly 'coalesce' in the discourse community,” she says “is to ignore the potential conflicts that a writer may encounter in shaping a text to meet the

expectations of audiences with differing levels of experience and expertise and with various reasons for reading the text.” She argues for a social perspective of audience that doesn't seek to stabilize audience but “envisions the multiple, layered, conflicting audiences that exist” and “accounts for the dynamic, social nature of communication.” While Peter Vandenburg suggests that “refiguring audience as an active plurality necessitates a shift from audience analysis to audience 'construction'” and places audience in the realm of invention (79), Marilyn Cooper argues that the focus needs to shift to that of the social context of writing and that we need to understand that writers “communicate with and know their audiences” (371). In “Ushering 'Audience' Out,” Anthony Paré argues for redefining audience not as participating in a discourse community, but as participating in a conversation. He shows, in studying the way social workers write documents for judges, the way writers are aware not only of the multiple audiences they write for, but of the effect their writing may have on the relationships they have with those readers.

1.6 The Web, Blogging and Audience

“Students writing for Web publication may be able to reach the kinds of engaged and active audiences that we often have them envision” (Alexander 388). But writing for the web doesn't eliminate entirely the issues addressed above. We still must wrestle with how much invention of the audience is going on versus how much the students are simply addressing an external audience. And can one analyze a web audience any better than the illusory general or universal audience? How? The students are still novices and may have difficulty, even when faced with (or because they are faced with) an external

audience, adjusting their writing to that audience in a way that they don't lose entirely their own voice and purpose. Further, because writing for the web is public, there exists the possibility of receiving feedback that directly challenges the writer's viewpoint. This feedback may be useful and constructive and help the student writer account for the opposing view, but it may be unhelpful as well. The view expressed may be a radical one or it may be expressed in a way that is so confrontational as to discourage the student from considering it and may make them dig their heels in in support of their original viewpoint.

And, in the case of class blog, there is an instant community to which the students belong and one that they are attempting to join, one that has its own conventions that differ from the ones they were taught or learned in order to test well. As with any community, it takes time to learn or define the rules, but part of the definition of rules includes describing the kind of readers the community members envision as their ideal readers. This is a step, in other words, toward defining an audience. That definition included a description of the type of writing to pursue including the formality level and the topics. In a sense, however, the student may potentially take different views of audience into account at different time depending in part on how she positions herself. A student may, for example, determine that her primary audience is herself and write in a way that addresses that audience, remaining somewhat egocentric in that way. This may be a good way to begin, but she will need to move beyond that single audience in order to improve. Different students may participate in different discourse communities. One may attempt to draw the attention of political bloggers. Others may situate themselves

within the community of other student bloggers writing primarily about topics of interest to them. Still another may have a specialized community in mind such as those interested in anime or role-playing games. The benefit of this to the rest of the class is tremendous, as it brings in those multiple readers with multiple viewpoints. What will an anime fan think of a critique of Bush's handling of hurricane Katrina?

Though I would suggest that audience not be viewed in any kind of monolithic way, I think for freshman writers, especially, there is some comfort in believing they are writing to someone. At first, it might be the teacher, but faced with an actual reader, they begin to realize they are writing to someone. Jonathan Alexander writes about having his students write for e-zines, the audiences of which “became a paramount and galvanizing force” (399). E-zines, he argues, provide something a standard textbook cannot: “an actual forum for student writing with a strong emphasis on audience and purpose” and the potential for students “to move in and among various audiences, contexts and sites of potential political and cultural action” (407).

Many composition teachers have been having their students write for the web in its static form that existed in the late 1990s. Their impetus for doing so has been twofold. First, they wanted to explore the issues the web presents in terms of visual rhetoric. Second, they wanted to provide their students with an audience (Benda 61-2). Smith argues, in fact, that “the public aspect [of writing for the web] is becoming . . . the most important reason for teaching digital composition” (240). At the end of her description of using the web to publish student writing, she explains, however, that we should be teaching students to write for a general audience because so many different kinds of

people can access these web publications (248). Written in 2000, this may have been an appropriate way to teach audience in relation to writing for the web; however, as web sites and search engines proliferate, we can once again consider more complex conceptions of audience.

Benda suggests in fact that the key issue facing teachers and students writing for the web is not how to approach audience, but in finding an audience for the web writing that they've done (130). Some have resorted simply to having students' web writing be written primarily for their peers in the class. We have seen this approach in discussion forums within course management systems (Lowe). While the results of such an approach are perhaps more fruitful than simple peer review, still students are not approaching audience in the complex ways we may want them to. As Benda points out, students may write for the web in the same way they do for other classroom assignments, negating the one main advantage of writing for the web, that of having students write to readers outside the classroom (129).

Blogging, or writing in a web log, offers many advantages over early web writing. First and foremost is the ease with which it can be used. Smith explains that in order to teach web writing, she had to give her students lessons in basic HTML as well as instruction in the UNIX system where all their file management took place. Blogging software has now been developed that makes it unnecessary to know HTML or UNIX in order to publish to the web. Secondly, because of the commenting feature of most blogging software, it provides a way for readers to interact with the writing, something that was impossible in static HTML pages described above. Third, blog software provides

possibilities for attracting an audience that were largely unavailable to the early creators of web sites. All of these things open up new possibilities for considering audience. Blogging offers a way to by considering a smaller, perhaps more homogeneous audience, based on the classroom itself. Students can navigate between writing for the self, classmates and the teacher. Further, as students begin surveying the web landscape related to their chosen topics, they may begin to analyze the kinds of readers they'd like to reach, combining a bit of audience analysis with audience invention. Even if they write for these specific audiences, because their writing is part of collective that is not topic-specific, as I alluded to earlier, they may end up with real readers outside of that specific audience, requiring them to consider multiple audiences. In addition, as part of the collective and wanting the collective project to succeed, they collaborate with their peers, commenting on their peers' work, making suggestions for other aspects of their ideas to consider. All of this provides a rich exploration of exactly what student writers are approaching when they approach audience. It also allows for development over time of complex positions on audience. In some ways, this happens naturally as it takes time for an audience to discover the class blog, but students may also, with assistance and guidance from an instructor, work on any stage of dealing with audience.

Naturally, composition teachers have begun to explore blogs as a new form of writing on the web. There is, it seems, much more work being done by rhetoricians examining the complexities of blogging as a phenomenon and the rhetorical strategies used by various groups and individuals. A glance at the table of contents for "Into the Blogosphere," an early collection of essays by composition and rhetoric scholars about

blogging reveals on two of its twenty-two articles directly relate to pedagogy. In “Remediation, Genre, and Motivation,” Brooks, et. al. discuss the different genres teachers might successfully remediate via a weblog. They focus on journals, notebooks and filters or note cards. The first two genres they explain are easier for students to master while the third, the filter-type blog (and the only blog overtly concerned with audience) is more difficult to master.

The writer needs a strong sense of motivation and interest in a topic and a basic knowledge of the topic, and needs to know how to search the web effectively, to determine whether or not the site found is worth commenting on and sharing (whether good, bad, interesting, or provocative), to read effectively, to summarize and paraphrase, to link within the weblog software he/she is using, and how to write effectively for an audience that may be only slightly known (classmates and professor), or even unknown and abstract (a web surfer).

The kind of process described above is exactly the kind of process many writing teachers aim for and yet, Brooks, et. al. shy away from this approach because it is unfamiliar and difficult for students.

In a recent piece on place blogging, Tim Lindgren offers a combination of rhetorical analysis and pedagogical approach, analyzing place bloggers, those bloggers who blog about geographic locations and then thinking about how blogs and online communities expand our concept of place even as it reinforces it. He explains, “this rhetorical place [of the weblog] is designed to foster a deeper sense of place.” He goes on to suggest that place blogging provides an opportunity to remediate field notes and

nature writing and an opportunity for interesting uses of web writing:

“[S]tudents could be documenting their engagement with university environs throughout their process of fieldwork and observation instead of using the web simply as publishing mechanism for the final product. In this way, the role of technology in mediating perception could be part of the ongoing discussion of how local knowledge is both created and shared.”

So while many of the articles that address certain rhetorical aspects of blogging, few offer explicit implications for teaching in the classroom.

Kairos, the online journal dedicated specifically to rhetoric, technology, and pedagogy, has few articles on blogging specifically. Lindgren's article is joined by an article by Steven Krause on a blogging experiment gone bad. He explains that “many writing teachers seem to be using blog spaces as places to facilitate dynamic and interactive writing experiences.” Krause goes on to critique his own use of blogging for this type of interaction and collaboration, ultimately deciding that email lists and discussion forums still have their place for interaction and collaboration. He suggests, in fact, that one of the reasons for his failure was the lack of a specific audience for the blog. When discussion finally opened up, it was because one student posted a message about one of the readings to the class email list. He explains, “she intuitively knew that her message would actually reach the 'real audience' of the class community. She felt her message was urgent, important, and beyond the realm of an assignment, and that her best option for getting her message to her specific audience was with the class emailing list.” What he demonstrates, of course, is the very existence of multiple audiences. The class

blog had not really been set up for the kind of interchange the student's email prompted. The blog functioned more as a publishing space rather than a collaborative space and thus had a different kind of implied audience.

Charles Lowe and Terra Williams offer an approach that draws from the kinds of collaborate spaces Krause refers to in "Moving to the Public." As they say, "we have found that by extending the discourse to a large community outside of the classroom, our student bloggers regularly confront "real" rhetorical situations in a very social, supportive setting." Further, they explain that earlier uses of online communication tools such as those found within course management systems "reflect a restricted definition of public . . . a place in which the grade and the teacher are largely what matter." While they commend attempts at providing assignments for students that either provide a real publishing venue for their students or ask students to give detailed descriptions of potential audiences, the audience for these assignments, they explain, is still the teacher. Their use of blogs in the classroom was a direct attempt at getting away from having students write for the teacher. They describe the many positive outcomes for their students, including a greater sense of community, of feeling supported in their writing and of finding ideas and appropriate ways of writing from their peers' examples on the blog. But perhaps the most successful accomplishment was giving the students ownership over their own writing:

In a classroom that uses weblogs extensively for posting content, as well as discussion and feedback from peers, the ongoing conversation becomes the voice of that community, which can make itself heard over the voice of any one,

including the teacher. With the teacher no longer the overly predominant active reader and responder of student texts, students, as a community, take more ownership of their writing.

When we turn to research in other fields, such as computer science, on blogs and blogging, we see a similar concern with audience and the effect audience has on blog writers. In Rebecca Blood's collection of essays on blogging, *We've Got Blog*, there are numerous references to audience, some as complicated as those of the composition researchers. One of the first bloggers, Cameron Barrett declares that "Weblogs . . . are designed for an audience" (30). Joe Clark, in "Deconstructing 'You've Got Blog'" says "this entire question [of whether to blog] revolves around a single word: *audience*" (emphasis in original; 63). He goes on to say, "It is idealistic in the extreme to counsel bloggers not to concern themselves with an audience. The advice 'Write for yourself,' while appropriate for a self-help course, applies poorly to the web" (63). And, I would argue, for composition classrooms. Many look at the blog audience as a community rather than the passive monolithic audience usually associated with the consumers of big media. Blood herself ends her contribution with a call for a transformation of "writers and readers from 'audience' to 'public' and from 'consumer' to 'creator'" in an effort to create a participatory community (16). Douglas Rushkoff goes further, saying that "your success [as a blogger] will be directly dependent on your ability to create excuses for people to talk to one another. For the real measure of content's quality is its ability to serve as a medium" (118). The point, then, for many bloggers is to have a collection of readers that one might call an audience, but who participates in your discussion,

contributes in some way to the conversation that they've initiated in their writing on the blog.

Even more quantitative studies by computer scientists show that audience is an important consideration for many bloggers. Nardi, et. al. conducted an ethnographic study of twenty-three bloggers. They observed that sometimes bloggers wrote only to friends and people they knew in real life, but were aware that others were reading. For many, this external audience provided motivation: “Bloggers . . . reported that they gained momentum when they realized others were actually reading their posts” and that they posted when they were feeling drained because they didn't want to “disappoint their audience” (n.p.). Bloggers also considered their audience as they wrote, sometimes changing what they wrote to accommodate their audience or to avoid creating unnecessary conflict with their friends, family, or colleagues. Nardi, et. al. conclude that “consciousness of audience is central to blogging” and that the bloggers they studied “wanted to develop an audience beyond their personal social network. The occasional email from a stranger who responded to the blog was often satisfying and motivating.”

The motivation to blog depends in part on having an audience. The same seems to be true for writing in general. Composition teachers want their students to develop a complex and comprehensive vision of audience in order to develop as writers. Blogging offers the opportunity for teachers to provide students with the opportunity to experience an audience that is not the broad and general audience that composition textbooks posited but is diverse and perhaps challenging at times. At the same time, within the context of the writing classroom, teachers may provide students with an appropriate framework to

think about who their audience is and how to manage their writing in preparation and in response to it. In order for this opportunity to be fulfilled successfully, one needs to have an audience in the first place. In the next chapter, I will explain how the technical aspects of blogging allow for students to not just have the potential of an audience, but to quickly develop a real readership. The pursuit of the audience itself, as it does with “professional” bloggers, provides an added motivation for writing that can be as beneficial as the feedback that audience provides.

