# A Sense of Audience in Written Communication

Edited by

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# A SENSE OF AUDIENCE IN WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

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**PART II: Empirical Considerations**

# *Preface*

***The study of audience,*** a central concept in composition studies, demonstrates convincingly the inevitable multi-disciplinary nature of theory and research in composition studies. Studies of audience carry a weighty history. They engage theorizers and practitioners, humanists and empiricists. They concern all disciplines interested in communication, knowledge-making, and written texts. They require introspection, observation, interviews, comparisons among the different kinds of writers in different situations, text analysis, speculation, argument.

The fifth volume in the *Written Communication Annual* series, *A Sense of Audience in Written Communication* continues our multi-disciplinary tradition. Featuring historians, theorists, and empiricists, this impressive collection of original work organizes what we know about the role of audience in written communication and considerably advances our understanding of it.

Previous volumes of the *Annual* collect original studies of linguistic approaches to research on writing, culturally contrastive rhetoric, academic writing, historical perspectives on the relation of oral and written communication, and writing in the community.

—*Charles R. Cooper and
Sidney Greenbaum*
Series Editors

# *Foreword*

*Like so many collaborative projects* in our profession of rhetoric and composition, this collection began to take shape at a CCCC (Conference on College Composition and Communication) session—held in New Orleans in 1986. At that session, Duane, who was just beginning to develop an interest in audience and who was presenting a report concerning an experiment on audience awareness, heard Gesa speak about her emerging interest in the topic. As so often happens at CCCC sessions, we discussed our mutual interest and agreed to share some of our work. In the months that followed, we read and responded to each other's work on audience. When we met again at the 1987 CCCC meeting in Atlanta, we decided to coedit a scholarly collection on audience awareness in writing. Again, we corresponded by mail for a year, until the next annual convention—this time in St. Louis in 1988. It was then that we finalized plans for this collection—over breakfast at a McDonald's restaurant several blocks from the conference hotel.

Since then, the two of us have exchanged hundreds of telephone calls, letters, notes, Bitnet computer network messages, and drafts of manuscript sections. And, each of us has worked closely—via the mail, telephone, and brief meetings at CCCC in Seattle—with the authors who have contributed to this collection. We've done our part to keep the U.S. Postal Service, the long-distance telephone companies, and the airlines in the black.

From the beginning, we wanted this collection to have a broad, interdisciplinary focus on audience because that is the need that we perceive in the profession. Given the current state of scholarship in composition and communication studies, we believe that researchers, theoreticians, and teachers interested in audience need a collection that examines audience with a variety of lenses and from a variety of camera angles. We satisfied each other's, as well as our editors', sense of what the audience for this collection might need.

Working on this collection has helped us to appreciate the wide array of valuable scholarship being produced by colleagues in our field, rhetoric and composition, as well as colleagues in other fields—including linguistics, cognitive science, reading, communication, media arts, psychology, sociology, anthropology, education, ESL (English as a Second Language), and law. We see the potential for explosive growth of work in audience. We hope that some of that work is even more broadly focused than this collection, and, of course, we see the need for future work that focuses very narrowly on some of the key issues in audience in written communication. We hope that this collection, at least in some small way, encourages others in the profession to do work that helps to increase our understanding of audience.

# Acknowledgments

*Together, we wish to thank* the many people who have directly helped us with this collection. First, of course, we wish to thank the scholars and teachers who invested their time, intellect, and care to write the chapters that constitute the heart of this book. We thank them for offering such a wide range of thinking regarding audience in writing.

Both of us owe much to our students, who have encouraged us to assume many audience roles: teacher, mentor, guide, coach, friend, parent, learner. We hope that we have served them as we should.

Bob Mittan and Joey Lorrey were invaluable as they assisted us with copy editing, file management, and word processing.

We thank Ann West for her patience and guidance. It is delightful to work with her.

Individually, we also wish to thank some other people whose assistance has been less direct but no less important.

From Gesa:

I am grateful to Charles Cooper and Kathryn Shevelow, for their guidance and inspiration, and to Lauren O'Connor and Kenneth Richardson for encouraging me to pursue my education and showing me what I could do.

Thanks to colleagues in the profession, Carol Berkenkotter, Lisa Ede, Peter Mortensen, and Patricia Sullivan, for stimulating conversations and encouragement to pursue my interest in audience.

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Special thanks go to Krystoff Przykucki for years of friendship, and most importantly, to Anthony Schreiner, for his support, encouragement, and companionship.

From Duane:

Thanks to my mentors for the many years they have served as my most caring audience: Gene Piché, Nick Karolides, Mike Graves, Les Whipp, and John Hollowell.

# Introduction:
## Theories and Research on Audience in Written Communication

### GESA KIRSCH
### DUANE H. ROEN

*More than a decade ago,* Moffett directly and forcefully announced the need for greater attention to audience in composition studies: "If anybody is going to do anything about the teaching of writing, the first priority is going to have to be the rekindling of the sense of audience. Until that's done, nothing else is going to happen" (Squire et al., 1977, p. 298). And, this rekindling has occurred. For example, an on-line search of ERIC entries from 1980 through the first few months of 1989 yielded 449 abstracts, amounting to 675,661 computer bytes—roughly the size of this book. Perhaps it is an anomaly, but two of the five articles in the October 1989 issue of *Research in the Teaching of English* deal with audience. It is clear that the concept of audience has emerged as a central theme in many scholarly discussions.

Current approaches to audience include historical studies of classical rhetoric, studies of writers' audience awareness during composing, the relation between audience awareness and syntactic and lexical features, and studies of audiences as discourse communities. Such journals as *Research in the Teaching of English, College English, College Composition and Communication, Rhetoric Review* and *Written Communication* have published articles on audience in increasing numbers. Studies of audience are scattered across numerous journals, anthologies, and book chapters, not only in the field of composition but also in literary studies, reading theory, education, cognitive psychology, philosophy, and linguistics.

Part of this renewed attention to audience has accompanied an increased interest in the social-constructionist view of composition (Bruffee, 1986). Old notions of audience have been scrutinized because traditional discussions of audience, such as those that could be found in textbooks of a decade ago (and a few today), limit themselves to an analysis of the demographic factors of hypothetical readers, their educational background, income, location, and class. What has been missing in such discussions is a sense of the social context in which text production and dispersion take place, a sense of the forums (publications, talks, conferences) that shape audiences, and a sense of the shifting dynamics of discourse communities. The arguments presented in this book aim to expand our community's sense of what an audience is, how it functions in the communicative process, and how it reflects the socio-political context of discourse communities. As scholars have begun to explore the rich contexts for writing, notions of "audience" have become increasing complex and acquired a host of different meanings. Kroll (1984), for example, has identified three different perspectives on audience: "the rhetorical," "the informational," and "the social." Furthermore, there is an ongoing debate about the "invoked" and "addressed" audience (Ede & Lunsford, 1984). Some scholars argue that writers have to analyze and accommodate actual readers, while others propose that writers create roles for audiences by providing textual cues with which readers identify. Park (1982) suggests:

> The meanings of "audience" . . . tend to diverge in two general directions:
> one toward actual people external to a text, the audience whom the writer
> must accommodate; the other toward the text itself and the audience
> implied there, a set of suggested or evoked attitudes, interests, reactions,
> conditions of knowledge which may or may not fit with the qualities of
> actual readers or listeners. (p. 249)

The different meanings ascribed to the term *audience* have complicated current discussions and pose the question of how to study best a sense of audience in written communication.

There is, for example, the question of what research methods are best suited to study writers' audience awareness and its manifestations in various forms. The contributors to this book offer an array of approaches, ranging from historical studies to ethnographies and experi-

mental designs. It has sometimes been argued that the use of different
research methods produces competing forces in a discipline such as
composition (North, 1987) and, more importantly, that different re-
search methods are based on conflicting epistemologies. The recogni-
tion of such differences in epistemologies is important in discussions
of audience and, for that matter, in all discussions of composition
research. Yet, such recognition, we believe, does not necessarily lead
to competing paradigms and the splintering of a discipline (as North
suggests), but, instead, can foster fruitful, dialogic discussions and
encourage a self-conscious, collective resistance to accepting a single
disciplinary paradigm. Composition studies and rhetoric assumes a
unique position when compared to other disciplines in that it is not
dominated by a single research paradigm. The chapters in this book
reflect this methodological diversity—both in research design and the
style guides used (MLA in Part I and APA in Part II)—and thereby set
the stage for a fruitful and continuing dialogue on audience.

## HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL
## CONSIDERATIONS OF AUDIENCE

In the first section, authors bring to bear historical and theoretical
perspectives on audience. Classical rhetoricians as far back as Aristotle
and Plato concerned themselves with the concept of audience in an
effort to enhance an orator's persuasive powers. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato
(370 BC/1952) declares that the rhetorician should adapt a speech to
characteristics of an audience: "He will classify the types of discourse
and types of souls, and the various ways in which souls are affected,
explaining the reasons in each case, suggesting the type of speech
appropriate to each type of soul" (p. 147). This advice rests on several
assumptions: that the audience is a known entity, that the values and
needs of an audience can be identified, and that the audience is separa-
ble from the discourse and its social context. These assumptions are
closely linked to the nature of spoken, not written, discourse. In oral
discourse, speakers typically have their audience in front of them, be it
a group of listeners assembled to hear a talk or an individual in a
face-to-face conversation. For classical rhetoricians, then, the audience

was a known, stable entity that a speaker could analyze, observe, and accommodate. Audiences of written discourse, however, are much less stable and predictable (Moffett, 1968). Writers often have to imagine or "create" audiences, audiences that can include a variety of readers with diverse opinions.

This shifting, intangible nature of audiences in written communication is the concern of many authors in the first part of this collection. Willey (Chapter 1), Willard and Brown (Chapter 2), and Brown and Willard (Chapter 3) examine the influence historical figures in rhetoric have had on our current understanding of audience. Willey provides an insightful account of the pre-Socratic origins of the debate over the audience invoked/the audience addressed. Willard and Brown, beginning with Plato and proceeding to Hirsch, trace the history of another point of debate, the often confused or neglected difference of "one" and "many" implied in the term *audience*. Brown and Willard, in another chapter, provide a careful reading and reexamination of Campbell's treatment of audience, thereby enriching recent studies of the history of writing instruction in U.S. colleges (for example, Berlin 1984, 1987; Connors 1986).

The lively debate about the audience addressed/audience invoked continues in several chapters of this book. Long extends an argument he began in 1980, suggesting that writers create roles or identities for readers within texts. These roles are assumed only for the duration of the reading process and do not have to coincide with roles that readers play in "real" life or even when reading other publications, Long proposes. His argument has immediate consequences for the teaching of writing: Instead of analyzing readers' beliefs and background knowledge, beginning writers need to learn how to produce textual cues that will lead readers to assume a desired identity or role. Tomlinson, in contrast to Long, argues for the powerful effect real readers can have on writers. Using the case of academic audiences, particularly committees designated to review scholarly work of peers, Tomlinson shows how local committee audiences—not intended as the "real" disciplinary audience—can bring very different expectations to scholarly work than the intended, national audience and thereby shape text production in forceful and sometimes unexpected ways. She also offers some helpful suggestions for both those who review and those who compose academic texts.