Audience

Definition

Both rhetoric and composition assume that a composer writes to an audience, though that audience can vary. In a rhetorical context, the audience typically is a public one, whether real or imagined. In a composition context, the audience can be an audience of the self, an audience of an implied reader, and/or an audience of people the author knows. In a classroom setting, as is the case in other settings, students frequently write to multiple audiences, for instance to a specific audience designed into a writing assignment, their colleagues in a peer review exercise, and a teacher who provides a final assessment.

Increasingly, students—like all composers—are also composing for public and distant audiences via the Web. These audiences can be particularly difficult to write for given that we can't always know in advance who they are. At the same time, these audiences can be very helpful when, for example, they respond (in venues like blogs) to drafts, showing the composers how a given text is being interpreted by a reader.

Importance to the Field

Early work in composing processes showed that experienced writers use their sense of audience as a way of framing a rhetorical situation and as a source of invention. Today, when we compose for different media, audience is just as integral to composing: composers create texts for an audience to read or review.

Resources

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