WHO IS THE GENERAL AUDIENCE AND WHAT DOES IT WANT: A SEQUENCE FOR TEACHING INFORMATIVE WRITING

CELEST MARTIN

I am a magazine junkie. I read articles on how to do, how to be, and how to solve everything. My non-professional subscriptions number between one and two dozen and my living room is a neatnik's nightmare. For years my prewriting preparation has been to gulp down a cover story or two with my morning coffee. Before writing, I also read a regular opinion column or two, because reading such columns engages me in a dialogue with the author, as well as with other readers of the column. This dialogic sense is central to my composing process, inspiring me to invite response from my own audience.

In fact, because I am such an avid magazine reader, I view myself as a member of a community of readers, a member of "the general audience." This community feeling transfers to my writing; when I write, I visualize my fellow readers, sitting at their kitchen tables with their coffee or leaning back in an office chair, reading the latest issue of a journal in between student conferences. For example, I know you people reading this article. I see you

at conventions; I talk to you in the elevators, at the sessions, late at night over cocktails in the Hyatt lounges of cities all over the country. We talk about our research and about our students.

And one of the puzzles we have tried to solve, both at late night téte à têtes and in our journals, is how to help our students develop a sense of audience in the artificial environment of the composition classroom. In the late decade, we've researched, theorized, and suggested many elements in our efforts to help students experience the rhetorical transaction between writer and reader: social cognitive skills, the meanings of audience, heuristics for creating audience profiles, and case approaches, to name a few.[1]

But while all of these theories and solutions have merit, each focuses mainly on our students as writers, trying to solve a writing problem. I believe that the failure of our students to conceptualize an audience is a reading problem, not one of genre or amount, necessarily, but one of perceptual paucity. Our students perceive of themselves as ecologists or engineers, as consumers or commuters, as surfers or skiers. But they do not perceive themselves as readers, not in the sense I have described to you in my opening paragraphs. Nor do they have a vocabulary for talking about what works for them as readers, about why they can pick up in an article with information they can remember. Their metadiscourse skills for reading are even less than those for writing.

And only when we have a comfortable sense of ourselves as readers, as part of an audience, can we have a realistic sense of ourselves as writers communicating and contributing to an audience. Students must learn to read like writers, and to write like readers.[2] Whether they are reading *Time, Newsweek, Sports Illustrated, Playboy* or *Cosmopolitan*, they must learn to dissect, to look at the supporting structure of an article as well as at the detail that holds it together. And, when they are writing, they must be conscious of helping their readers along, making connections, using analogies when the text becomes technical, reminding the audience of old ideas as they introduce new ones. When we read, we follow psycholinguistic maps; when we write, we must make them. The recently published NCTE volume *Convergences: Transactions in Reading and Writing* makes this point over and over. Tierney and Leys put it this way: "Successful writers integrate reading into their writing experience and successful readers integrate writing into their reading experience." (26)

The case approach, or situational writing, does encourage students to involve themselves rhetorically, clarifying for beginning writers who they are in relation to a fairly well-defined audience. Certainly, this approach may be helpful for individual assignments; some business and technical communications texts use this approach almost exclusively.[3] But the casebook method is open to the criticism leveled at it by Douglas Park:

> . . . most often the examples tend to be . . . examples of highly structured situations. . . . But the writing tasks which can grow from examples tend to be limited to hypothetical cases: 'Imagine that you are . . .' Aside from the inherent limitations of such assignments, the fact is that most of the time we want students to learn to write for a 'general' audience. That is to say, we want them to write in relatively unstructured situations where little is given in the way of context and much remains to be invented by the writer (256).

Which brings me to that most dreaded—by teachers and students alike—"general audience" assignment of all: the research paper. Of course for years students perceived, and sometimes quite rightly, that the real purpose of research papers was to make them use some cobwebby corner of a library on a crisp fall Saturday, and then drive themselves berserk typing proper footnote form. I won't go into that here. The purpose of a research paper in my courses (at least in recent years) has been to teach students strategies for presenting information. In fact, I now use the term "curiosity" paper to alert the students to the fact that I expect their papers to satisfy my curiosity on some subject of their choosing.

In the past, however, before I developed the "new-and-improved" method I will share with you, research papers brought me to the brink of lunacy with platitudes about "Today's society. . . ." They were voiceless research papers, with one unwitting addressee and seemingly no invoked audience (Ede and Lunsford 155-171). I'm sure you know the ones I mean.

Yet, as I've already said, I'm an easy audience; I'll read almost any magazine article with an interesting title, even if I don't think I'll ever need to convert the area under my stairs to storage space. I'll just read it for curiosity's sake. Some of my students had chosen interesting topics: why couldn't they write research papers I wanted to read?

One coffee-sipping morning found me reading a *Newsweek*

article on "How the Brain Works." Now, I'm no scientist, and I don't know much about neurons, but I was fascinated. And *Newsweek* must have figured its other readers would find their curiosity whetted by the topic or they wouldn't have made it their cover story. My own brain began to work: "The curiosity piece—that's what sells magazines. Because that's what people like to read. And that's what my students don't read enough of—or maybe it's just that they don't know *how* they read them. They've never figured out how authors help them follow along on topics they know nothing about."

And then I began to wonder why, with all our interest in teaching a workable concept of audience, we composition teachers hadn't thought much about looking to those sources whose very existence depends upon knowing the needs of a general audience, magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*. What had been a vague notion of how to use the brain article in class became a pedagogical plan with several elements:

(1) First, I had to figure out just how the *Newsweek* staff could chart me through territory previously unknown to me, territory tangled with scientific nomenclature. In short, if I took this article as representative of the cover stories of general interest news magazines, I would have to learn the conventions of the informative article intended for a broad readership.

(2) Once I had analyzed how the article met the needs of a reader who was reading for curiosity—reading to consume information, but not necessarily to use it, I would have to teach my students to read with a heightened awareness of how and why they read general interest articles, and what writers do to help that reading process function smoothly and uninterruptedly.

(3) I would have to get my students to turn their intuitive competence as readers into conscious performance as writers.

(4) I would have to convince my students that I am the "general audience," that their research papers should be articles designed to arouse and fulfill my desires as a reader. That the grade I gave their papers was equivalent to a consumer's decision to purchase a magazine again or not.

Looking at reading and writing connections has become an important part of composition research in the last five years, as the previously cited *Convergences* volume attests to. Donald Murray said in 1982, "It is time researchers in the discipline called English bridge the gulf between the reading researcher and the

writing researcher . . . the act of writing is inseparable from the act of reading" (141). One article which goes a long way toward bridging that gulf, an article I found enormously helpful when pulling together my scattered thoughts on using the *Newsweek* cover story, is Bonnie Meyer's "Reading Research and the Composition Teacher: The Importance of Plans" (37-49).

Meyer contends that "writers can offer readers support in some recognizable way" (40) and suggests several areas where this support is particularly crucial to the reading process:

1) When writers inform, they must present new knowledge while reminding readers of old knowledge.

2) Readers look for cues to the relations among ideas.

3) The average reader remembers more when the discourse is governed by an overall plan.

Of course, none of these notions should be startling to us, but what was startling to me was that I had never before tried to make my students feel these needs as a reader in the act of reading. I had always just announced them as the concerns of a good writer. The notion of an overall plan has been behind our efforts to teach the rhetorical modes: comparison/contrast, classification, definition, description, and so on. In recent years, however, the modal method has come under attack as artificial and unrealistic, since few pieces of "real" writing (like *Newsweek* cover stories) represent a pure mode, but rather incorporate the modes as strategies in the larger realm of informative discourse.

Is there, then, a common plan governing informative articles intended for a general audience? Is there a sort of magazine article plan? Yes and Yes. Several years ago, when my colleague Bob Schwegler and I were trying to shape a chapter on informative discourse for our speaking/writing text, we came up with the following set of what we called "standard questions." These standard questions reflect what we believe audiences expect to find out when they are reading to be informed, or to satisfy curiosity:

Significance: What is the topic and why is it useful to learn about it?

Background: What is the history of this topic? What terms need to be defined?

Features: What are its special characteristics, capabilities? What is its appearance?

Good/Bad: What is good about the topic and what is bad? How does it compare with others of its kind?
Procedures: How does it work? Where can it be gotten? How can it be done?
Applications: What is the present and future importance of the topic? How will it affect people? What should they do?
(Katula, Martin, Schwegler 233-234)

How did we arrive at these characteristics of informative discourse? By reading: Bob is a fellow magazine junkie and we simply pulled apart articles in both popular magazines and scholarly journals and finally agreed upon these six elements as basic to most informative writing, with some pieces emphasizing one element more than others.

Of course, after Bob and I worked out these elements, it was impossible for me to indulge my magazine reading passion without looking for significance, background, features, good/bad, procedures and applications. So, I took my "How the Brain Works" article and marked up the sections which were obvious examples of these elements.

Next, I looked for cohesive ties, those words that clarify the relationships among ideas, and I marked those. Both Ross Winterowd (225-232) and Anita Brostoff (278-294) have emphasized the importance of cohesive ties for readers and writers. Then, remembering Bonnie Meyer's advice, I looked for boundary sentences where old information and new information meshed, and for repetition of topic-related words. Meyer's research indicated the following importance of cue words: When cue words (such as those you will see circled in the excerpted *Newsweek* article) were dropped from a reading selection, recall ability of very poor readers and very skilled readers was unaffected. But for the largest group—the average readers—the addition of cue words increased their recall ability significantly. I circled cue words throughout the brain article, amazed to find them just where they were supposed to be. Had *Newsweek's* staff studied reading theory? Probably not. Do they know the needs of a general audience? Most certainly.

Finally, I examined the kinds of detail used by the writers, looking especially for analogies. I have always told my students analogies are the heart of good scientific and technical articles because they help the lay person look at a complex idea in everyday terms. *Newsweek* had performed well in this area also.

Okay, fine. The elements I needed to teach the ways in which skilled writers help their readers were all here. But now the hard part: I had to get my students to discover these elements for themselves. So, I bought a fresh copy of *Newsweek*, made several copies of the cover story, and told my students to bring in their own copies if they subscribed. Then, I began all my preparation: I passed out handouts Bob Schwegler and I had designed on "Planning Informative Reports," and I went over in detail the six characteristics of informative discourse. I defined and exemplified cohesive ties, cue words, and the concept of old and new information. I reminded the students of the various kinds of detail we had talked about earlier in the course: analogies, examples, extended definitions, comparisons.

Then, having assigned the *Newsweek* article to be read, I arranged the students in groups of four and gave them the following instructions:

> Go through the article you have just read. Label the sections according to which of the six elements of informative discourse they represent. Mark cohesive ties and cue words. Pick out the various kinds of details used by the writer. Mark these items in any way you wish, then make me a key to indicate how you've marked the article. Work as a group—you may work together all through the article or assign sections to each member after agreeing upon a key. Your efforts are due in one week. You may use this class period to begin.

My students looked at me in amazement—this seemed like such a simple project. Why was I making such a big deal about a reading assignment? And did they have to mark up the whole article? They assured me they now understood what cohesive ties and cue words were. Why did they have to do this? But they humored me: after all what were the alternatives? I mean, they could have to write an essay for next week. This, they decided, was easier.

The excerpt below represents one group's efforts at this assignment:

Tricia Johnston
Maureen McCarthy
Tammy Ganey
Art Dunn

3-2-83
WRT 102

KEY

F = Features
S = Significance
BG = Background
Underlines = Comparison (Form of Detail)
* = Main Point
= Cohesion

Good = Good
Bad = Bad
Pro = Procedure
Ex = Example (Detail)
AP = Applications
= Cue Words (Cohesion)

HOW THE BRAIN WORKS

The mind has always been dumbfounded by the brain. That three-pound glob of matter hardly seems up to the task of writing "Paradise Lost," composing "Eroica" or discovering relativity. Yet for 2,400 years, ever since Hippocrates located the seat of the intellect inside the skull, the mind has been forced to admit that its greatest achievements, its loftiest thoughts, its deepest emotions all arise from something with the consistency of Jell-O and the color of day-old slush. Now some neuroscientists are beginning to suspect that everything that makes people human is no more than an interaction of chemicals and electricity inside the labyrinthine folds of the brain.

By exploring these ordinary processes, scientists hope to explain the extraordinary qualities of the mind. The task requires prodigious bootstrapping, since neuroscientists must use the very same structures and cells that they wish to comprehend in order to comprehend. It is a quest as compelling as any the brain has undertaken. 'As long as the brain is a mystery, the universe, the reflection of the structure of the brain, will also be a mystery.' So wrote the great Spanish neuroanatomist Santiago Ramon y Cajal at the beginning of this century. For although man seems to have mastered the mystery of galaxies and the spinning of atoms, in fact he does not know them at all until he understands how he understands them.

Shakespeare called the brain 'the soul's frail dwelling-house.' For scientists, the challenge is to explore the house without disturbing the occupant. To do this, they are walking through animal brains with microscopic electrical probes, cell by neuron cell, to discover where the glimpse of a predator goes after it registers on the eye. They are poking sea slugs to see how the memory of a touch becomes etched on a primitive brain. They are injecting humans with chemicals that shine with radioactivity to see which of their brain cells call the rest of the mind to attention. Their goal is to map the brain, to match up one fold of gray matter with, say, hearing and another fold with a knack for learning languages.

A second goal of the scientists is to decipher the neural code, the language that translates perceptions of the outside world into electrical blips and chemical drips that the brain can store and find when it needs them. Cracking the neural code would explain how electrical signals carry anger or any other emotion, and how chemical messages contain the memory of a long-ago madeleine. The code remains largely unbroken, but at least the transmission lines have been identified. They are neurons, cells with a central core from which long tails and wispy "dendrites" sprout. The brain contains between 10 billion and 200 billion neurons, each forming bridges to so many others that the brain is abuzz with as many as 1 quadrillion connections. The average neuron 'is as complex as an entire small computer,' says William Shoemaker of the Salk Institute in La Jolla, Calif.

Neurons are programmed in the language of electricity and chemistry. When an electrical impulse reaches the tip of a neuron's tail, or axon, it fires a chemical called a neurotransmitter (drawing, page 42). This chemical message diffuses across a gap, called a synapse, to receptors on the next cell, triggering another electrical impulse that travels down a second axon, until the message reaches millions of neurons. Since 1975, scientists have discovered more than 50 neurotransmitters, substances carrying messages through the mind—to feel pain, to feel depressed or remember.

Neurons and their aides-de-camp, the neurontransmitters, are necessary for a full explanation of how the brain works, but they are not sufficient. Trying to define the brain by its neurons, says Dr. Frederick Goodwin for the National Institute of Mental Health, 'is like describing Notre Dame in terms of its stones.' The reductionist approach spawned the idea of a mosaic brain, each tiny neural tile inscribed with one memory or one set of orders for thinking. Sometimes it seems that brain maps are indeed quite specific, as when a neurosurgeon stimulated spots of a patient's exposed brain and elicited this stream of consciousness: "I heard a mother calling her little boy somewhere . . . I heard voices down along the river . . . A little memory, a scene in a play, they were talking and I could see it, I was just seeing it in my memory."

Different regions of the brain undoubtedly specialize in different activities. Speech and spatial ability come from the cerebral cortex, emotions from certain structures in the limbic system. But gradually scientists are coming to realize that activities which can be pinpointed to one area of the brain involve other regions, too. It seems that memories, for example, eventually lodge in the cortex, but only after passing through many distant way stations. The brain, then, is less a collection of isolated little players, each responsible for a different melody in the mental symphony, than a unified orchestra, with small numbers of neurons conducting an ensemble of millions.

One of the mental conductors seems to be the nucleus basalis, a small cluster of neurons nestled beneath the basal ganglia. Tracing

axons from all over the cortex back to their roots, researchers at Johns Hopkins University have found that many of them originate in this one little area. Neurons from the nucleus basalis reach areas controlling movement, senses and information processing, and emit a neurotransmitter involved in emotion, arousal, aggression and thought. The region thus acts like a maestro deft enough to gesture one way to command the percussionists into action, another to mellow the violins and another to draw melancholy tones from the French horns. Other studies have identified similar neural conductors. 'It suggests a whole new kind of organization in the brain,' says Dr. Robert Robinson of Hopkins. 'We are no longer struck with the mosaic pattern of each function pinpointed to one spot. Instead, some behaviors are distributed throughout the brain.' (*Newsweek*, February 7, 1983)

BG

Later, after I had worked through the rest of my plan for giving my students a concept of "the general audience," they told me that the reading and marking of the article, repetitious though it had been, had helped them examine their own reading process in a way they never had before. This training helped the students to be more objective readers of their own work later on—they were better able to play the role of audience to their own writing, assessing its gaps and omissions with greater sensitivity.

After the reading and marking assignment, the next step in my sequence is the repetition of an exercise performed earlier in the semester by the class as a whole with the instructor writing suggestions on the blackboard. This time, the students work in small groups. The assignment is this:

> Instructor supplies a list of topics, very general. My list included the following: Photography, travel, gourmet cooking, computers. Students are free to generate their own topics.
>
> Instructions to the student:
> Choose a topic from among the ones listed on the board. Select three possible audiences for the topic, then list what each of these various audiences would need to know about your topic. (Simply called "needs-to-know" list). Then write an opening paragraph aimed at each of these three audiences. This work is to be done in class as a group.

Two groups' efforts on this project focused on photography and gourmet cooking.

Photography

Audience:

1) Hobbyist-general public
2) Camera and equipment manufacturers
3) Professional photographers

Topics to cover:

1) Cost of merchandise
   How to develop film
   Brand names
   Operational functions
2) Cost to manufacture
   New designs
   Competition
   Advertisement
   Supply and demand
3) Quality of camera
   Types of film
   What's photographic (subjects to photograph)
   Developing techniques
   Mechanics of photography

Opening Paragraphs:

1) The General Public:

People love to remember holiday gatherings and special occasions. Memories stay very clear when you have pictures to refer to. Taking pictures is a rewarding hobby and an enjoyable pastime for people of all ages. The average cost of a camera is twenty dollars, and the film is about three dollars a roll. Development of the film can be done at any drug store at a cost of three dollars. The next time the family gets together, be sure to have your camera with you so that you will be able to remember the occasion in future years to come.

2) Camera and Equipment Manufacturers:

Today's camera manufacturers are constantly remodeling old equipment, formulating new designs, and developing new gimmicks to sell to the public. Advertisement is probably the key factor in camera manufacturing as well as in all the goods purchased by consumers. As a result, advertisement is the basis of competition among manufacturers and the basis of financial success.

3) Professional Photographers:

While reading a lengthy or technical report, most people are grateful to see a page with a photograph on it. The question, however, is this: Do people appreciate the value of a photograph? To some people, photographs are in books for one of two reasons: one, to take up space; two, to break up monotonous reading. It is these people, unfortunately,

who lack appreciation for the art of photography. Photography is an art that can only be mastered by a keen eye, a steady hand, and a vivid imagination. Oh, if everyone could view the world through the eyes of a professional photographer. Every landscape a potential masterpiece, every sunset a work of art, every photograph an expression of emotion, a dream . . .

Gourmet Cooking

Audiences:

1) Nutritionist
2) Gourmet cook (potential)
3) Housewife or Househusband

1) Needs to know: ingredients, deficiencies of patient, age of patient

Gourmet cooking is a fantastic thing to do, but it's hard for many people to cook and have the finished product come out with any substantial nutritional value. Many people don't seem to care what's in the food they eat as long as it tastes good, but as a nutritionist, you must observe all ingredients to make sure there's not too much of one substance or not enough of another. A full meal should include at least 25% of recommended daily allowance of each vitamin and mineral.

2) Needs to know: training, needed equipment, benefits, drawbacks

Many Americans' lives revolve around eating. Most people derive a great deal of pleasure out of eating food that tastes good. This means that gourmet cooking is in high demand. Often, a year-long apprenticeship to an established chef is the necessary training required to become a gourmet cook. Gourmet cooking requires a wide array of pots and pans, appliances, and other kitchen utensils. The benefits of gourmet cooking are numerous—especially the appreciation received for preparing fine food. There are also drawbacks to gourmet cooking. Often friends expect you will prepare a gourmet meal free of charge for their dinner parties. However, the benefits of gourmet cooking far outweigh the drawbacks, especially if you get paid for your cooking.

3) Needs to know: Skills needed, utensils, recipes, helpful hints, places to buy from, what to look for in vegetable and meat, how to prepare a dinner for two, four . . . cost

Gourmet cooking is an art. But with the right skills and a little patience, you can cook luscious delicacies in your own home. You will also find that cooking gourmet food does not always have to be expensive. And once you have truly mastered the craft, you will find it as easy to whip up pheasant under glass as to cook a pot roast.

As an instructor, I enjoyed hearing the students imagining themselves as readers and arguing about what each specific audience would be interested in reading about. In the opening

paragraphs reproduced above, you might note the style: use of parallel structure, use of absolutes. Since I had not covered sentence style at all yet, I found it interesting that this exercise, coming on top of the *Newsweek* reading assignment, produced some stylistically mature prose. I might hypothesize that the students were beginning to get into the spirit of magazine article writing, the spirit of "hooking the reader," and had intuited some notion of appropriate style from their intensive reading and marking of the article on the brain.

In fact, when Pfister and Petrick assigned students to analyze magazines intended for specific audiences (as opposed to general ones), they made the following comment:

> Most students were delighted with the dissection of a magazine, and their insights, as they studied the pictures and prose, the ads and articles, were often quite perceptive. (218)

This perception, I believe, reflects the students' tacit knowledge of themselves as readers, a knowledge activated to performance level by the subsequent small group writing assignment involving three different audiences.

Next in the sequence came the real test: I told the students to write a "curiosity paper," a paper that would pique the interest of a general audience on a topic familiar to the student, preferably a hobby or special interest. No research was required. Athletes were free to write about sports, so long as they could key in to an element of a particular sport which would attract a general audience, readers who were not athletes themselves. The paper was to be short, two-to-three pages. One student's paper, on "Storing and Caring for Red Wine" is reproduced below with annotations marking the six elements of the informative article, and circles around cohesive ties and cue words.

Storing and Caring for Red Wine

S With wine prices going up and up each year, it is now more useful than ever to have a working knowledge of the care and storage red wines require. Storing wine is not difficult and it can be very rewarding BG if it is done properly. Historically, wine was stored only by nobles or the wealthy because of the expense involved. Surely we have all heard of the damp, dark wine cellars where hundreds of bottles lay covered with dust and cobwebs. There was always a wine steward on hand to walk in the candle-lit aisles to check each rack individually. Today, S very few people have the room or money for a traditional wine cellar

but this has not stopped them from ageing (sic) wine themselves. The simplest and least costly way to store wine is to build a bin from clay tiles. Clay tiles are used because they insulate well and hence protect the bottles from temperature fluctuations which could ruin the wine. Direct and artificial light also affect the keeping quality of red wines, and therefore the bin should be placed in a dark area. A basement corner is perfect for this.

If wine is so sensitive to its surroundings, why might you ask, would anyone bother to store it? There are three very basic reasons. The first is that, unlike white wines, red wines improve with age. Often, the only difference between fine vintage wines and inexpensive jug wines is their age.

The second reason for ageing (sic) wine oneself is the fact that there is an aura of eliteness associated with ageing (sic) one's own wine. A wine collection is a status symbol indicating that one appreciates the finer things in life.

The third, and possibly most influential reason is a matter of economy. Vintage wines do not become expensive until they have been properly aged. It is much cheaper to buy young wine and age it yourself rather than to pay a wine merchant a good many dollars to do it for you. If you store an inexpensive bottle of wine for about five years, you will have a wine which has improved immeasurably. That is, provided that it does not spoil.

Until this point, we have only talked about the good points of storing and caring for red wines. Why do red wines sometimes spoil rather than mature? Occasionally it is because of the bottle's angle in the rack. It should age at approximately forty-five degrees or enough to keep the cork wet. If the cork is dry, it will shrink, allow air to enter, thus spoiling the wine. Incidentally, spoiled wine should not be discarded since it is only vinegar.

After wines have been opened it is best to keep them in the refrigerator to retard spoilage. They should be removed about an hour before serving to allow them to reach room temperature. Room temperature for red wines is sixty-two degrees.

Wine has evolved from a drink of kings to that of the common person. People have enjoyed it for relaxation, dinner and get togethers with friends. The consumption of wine, especially red, has increased yearly and it probably will continue to do so for the pleasure people derive from it and the fact that it is a rewarding hobby.

Bob Pjojian

(Student correctly perceives that his audience needs one last look at why they might reject learning to store red wines.)

Bob Pjojian was an average student who began the course with a C−. The curiosity paper was only the second paper assignment in the course, since I decided to attack the audience issue first this time around. Therefore, I had not talked about paragraph development, style, closings, or any other basics of a composition course in great detail. At that time WRT 102 had no prerequisites; about one-third of the students had had a prior writing

course; the rest had not. So naturally, neither Bob's paper nor the opening paragraphs reproduced below are representative of mature writing. But, as my "Before" set of paragraphs will attest, they are far better than what I had been able to achieve in the same amount of time—or even in much greater amount of time—before I made reader needs the focus of my writing courses.

What I had failed to see previously about my students' writing problems was this: Any writing problem is a problem because it interferes with a reader's ability to process a text efficiently and effectively, or because it ignores a reader's need for information, or the vital need of a reader to be addressed as a member of a group, be that group Americans, consumers, men, women, spectators, teachers, whatever. The pedagogical problem was how to key in to my students' sensitivity to the needs of others. I had to change the focus of my teaching from writing deficiencies to reading deficiencies. I had to convince my students that every time they were careless with their ideas and the connections among those ideas, they were dumping a problem on their readers. And I had to convince them that I—Professor X —was a member of the general reading audience and did not like to be dumped on.

In other words, their writing should appeal to me in the same way they expected an article in *Sports Illustrated* or *Rolling Stone* to appeal to them. To remind them of their own needs as readers, I would have them critique magazine articles from time to time. They began to understand that their recourse to a poorly-written article was not to buy the magazine again; mine to a paper which did not attempt to engage me as a reader was to give it a poor grade. As Flower and Hayes said of successful student writers, ". . . one of the most powerful strategies . . . was planning what one wanted to do to or for one's reader." (27)

Below are some openings—voiceless and uncaring—that I received before I discovered "reader-response teaching":

Crisis in the Third World

> The nations of the world, as they are known today, are divided into three separate worlds. The First World, consisting of the liberal democratic nations, includes twenty-four countries such as England, Japan and the United States. The Second World, consisting of the communist nations, includes eighteen countries such as the Soviet Union and Poland. The Third World, consisting of the lesser developed nations, includes one hundred twenty countries such as India, Mexico and Iran. The countries of the Third World

share a commitment to economic development, unlike the First and Second Worlds which have achieved their desired economic level.

The Sun is the Answer

Solar energy is definitely a plus for today's society. There is a need for it. The past few years have shown a big interest in the possibility of using the sun's energy for our own needs. It would take 5 billion gallons of gas an hour for 200 million years to equal the amount of energy the sun produces in one hour. Most places that have been using coal and oil for energy now have little fuel left. They are looking desperately for a new source of energy and solar energy is the answer. Even places where fuel is plentiful, it is a good idea to have an alternate power source.

Now that I present all elements of the writing process (except for the introspective early stages of the composing process) as reader-centered, I don't get openings like those any more. Instead, I get these introductions to the traditional research paper:

Introductory paragraphs from "Curiosity Papers"

Almost everyone, at some time in their lives, has seen a famous sign proclaiming: "Over 40 Billion Served." Most people have contributed to this figure by eating a hamburger at McDonald's fast-food restaurants. We have eaten many hamburgers, and yet, we really don't think about what happens to these hamburgers when they enter our bodies. These hamburgers undergo the essential bodily processes of digestion.

John Sabourin

Everyone knows the two biggest sports in the United States are baseball and football. And I'm sure the majority of people saw the triumphant victory of the Washington Redskins over the Miami Dolphins in the Superbowl, right? Well, the sport I'd like to discuss doesn't have quite so many viewers—at least not yet. This sport is gymnastics. Whereas gymnastics is only beginning to gain its popularity in the United States, it's already proven to be the most popular international sport of all. As a member of the gymnastic team at the University of Rhode Island, I've found that participating in such a sport is a full-time job.

Tricia Johnston

Did you ever stop to think about all those stories of magicians and sorcerers turning powder to stone or stone into gold? Did you ever stop to wonder, if perhaps, in the ages long since past, there was such an art as Alchemy? New evidence shows that perhaps the ancients of our world had the ability to turn powder into stone.

Bart Hellwig

For now, I'm no longer "just the teacher." I am the general audience.

Celest Martin, Associate Professor in the College Writing Program at the University of Rhode Island, teaches Freshman Writing, Business Communication, Technical Writing and Theory and Pedagogy of Composition. She is co-author of *Communication: Speaking & Writing* and author of several chapters in both writing and speaking textbooks.

NOTES

[1]See, for example, the following articles: Kroll, Barry M. "Social-Cognitive Ability and Writing Performance." *Written Communication* 2(1985): 293-305.

Rubin, Donald. "Social Cognition and Written Communication." *Written Communication* 2(1984): 211-245.

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Pfirler, F. Patrick, J. "A Heuristic Model for Creating a Writer's Audience." *College Composition and Communication* 31(1980): 213-220.

[2]See Frank Smith, "Reading Like a Writer." *Language Arts* 60(1983): 553-64.

[3]See, for example, *Cases for Technical and Professional Writing* by Barbara Couture & Jane Rymer Goldstein. Boston: Little, Brown, 1985.

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