Chapter 12
To Whom Do We Write?
Audience in EFL Composition Classes

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ABSTRACT
Writing is a complex process and used of course for an incalculable range of purposes and audiences. Teaching students to write in their mother tongue is hard, but teaching them to do this in a second or foreign language is even harder. This chapter focuses on the question of audience in teaching and learning writing, arguing that it is vital for students to be aware of an audience that eventually determines what, why, and how they will write. It seeks to provide a thorough understanding of Omani EFL students’ conception of audience and their current level of audience awareness and also to explore the relationship between audience awareness and students’ performance in composition classes and tests.

INTRODUCTION
The latest technological developments, changing workplace necessities, and cross-cultural exchanges make writing a more important skill than it has ever been. People write differently and yet the way they write affects their professional performance and can enhance their critical thinking skills. The challenges to writing effectively are numerous and the role of writing teachers and instructions is essential in helping students overcome them.

Teaching students to write in their mother language is hard; but teaching them to do this in a second or foreign language is even harder. In both cases, the writing teachers’ role is pivotal since their approaches and teaching strategies will surely affect learner perceptions and performance. Accordingly, finding methodologies that work best for improving student writing skills is a matter of great importance (Al-Mohammadi & Derbel, 2013, p. 181).

Current research shows that time allocated to writing instruction has been decreasing in recent
decades, while the rising demand for effective writers requires more not less attention to writing instruction so as to prepare students for an ever-changing world (Applebee & Langer, 2006). Because students come to writing classes with multiple skills, backgrounds and needs, attention to this diversity is necessary so that writing teachers can create varied approaches and techniques to bridge the gap between the high and low achievers among their students.

Among the many aspects that good writers should always attend to the matter of audience is crucial. And yet, in our experience, it the least attended to concern in composition classrooms. Learners who do not determine who their readers are may fail to write effectively and clearly transmit their message. The general perception among most EFL learners is that they are writing for their teachers, who end up as the sole audience for their students and who do not always prove to be a good audience since they are perceived mainly as evaluators.

While in composition classes teachers often play the role of audience, many assignments, projects, and papers require a secondary audience that varies according to the writing task. This study, then, focuses on the writers’ audience, arguing that it is vital for students to be aware of it since it determines what, why and how they should write. The idea is to provide a thorough understanding of Omani EFL college students’ conception of audience and their current level of audience awareness; also to explore the relationship between audience awareness and student performance in composition classes and tests. The research poses the following questions:

1. Why is determining audience important for EFL students’ writing?
2. How does an analysis of audience affect EFL students’ writing?
3. Does the audience for students’ writing consist of just receivers and “decoders” or can it include “encoders” and creators?

**THEORY AND RESEARCH ON AUDIENCE AWARENESS**

A good number of studies see audience awareness as a central factor for students’ success in writing (Black, 1989; Kirsch, 1991; Wong, 2005) and findings stress this (Crowhurst and Piche, 1979, p. 108). Research also shows that audience awareness is an indicator of writer proficiency and differentiates between high and low achievers.

Teachers in L1 composition, it emerges, do in fact tend to emphasize audience awareness and to remind their students of its importance. However, this is not the case in L2 composition classes, where students seem to encounter more challenges in determining their audience. Insensitivity to audience remains a reason why students fail to produce effective pieces of writing. Some researchers suggest that de-contextualization of writing situations diminishes audience awareness (Cohen & Riel, 1989; Nehal, 2004) and that most students anyway view writing as an artificial task which is all about testing and evaluation. In addition, students have limited exposure to authentic materials and practical writing for real purposes. This hampers the writing process and makes students unable to comprehend the interconnectedness between audience, writing purpose, style, and form (Clark, 2003).

The role of audience in writing theory and pedagogy has been widely explored. Its unseen nature was studied by Ede and Lunsford (1985, p. 168) and Park (1982, p. 251) who distinguished between “audience-addressed” and “audience-invoked”. Writing for an “audience-addressed” depends on the analysis of audience traits, status, characteristics, opinions, and beliefs, while writing for an “audience-invoked” focuses on constructing an image for anticipated readers.

Research on the issue is diverse in focus. Some studies examine writers’ audience awareness (Berkenkotter, 1981, p. 389; Cheng, 2005, p. 209; Kirsch, 1991; Zainuddin & Moore, 2003). Others scrutinize the links between audience-