This collection builds upon Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford's groundbreaking work to examine the rhetorical concept of audience as it relates to twenty-first century teaching and learning. Editors M. Elizabeth Weiser, Brian M. Fehler, and Angela M. González bring together compositionists from the departments of English, communications, public relations, and writing to offer insights that serve as a guide for incorporating audience awareness into the contemporary classroom.


Through these engagements, contributors offer insights on audience from divergent perspectives—composition pedagogy, new media studies, service learning and professional writing, diversity, and rhetorical and literary theory—that establish a third category in the addressed/invoked binary, an "audience updated" that takes various professional and cultural forms but is most evidently "audience interacting."
We would like to dedicate this book to our former professors in the Texas Christian University Rhetoric and Composition Program, who guided each of us into our professional careers. Ann George, Rich Enos, Carrie Leverenz, Brad Lucas, Charlotte Hogg, and Ronald Pitcock—our mentors, colleagues, and friends; surely you embody all that we could have wished for in a graduate faculty.
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Preface

Engaging Audience: Writing in an Age of New Literacies brings together theorists and practitioners—compositionists from departments of English, communications, public relations, and writing—to examine the rhetorical concept of audience from multiple perspectives in multiple settings. We begin with Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford’s germinal essay, “Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy” (affectionately shorted to AA/AI by our authors), and then follow up with their own later critique, “Representing Audience: Successful Discourse and Disciplinary Critique,” followed by their reenvisioned exploration of audience in the twenty-first century, “Among the Audience: On Audience in an Age of New Literacies,” written especially for this collection. From there our contributors approach audience from divergent perspectives—history, composition pedagogy, new media studies, service learning and professional writing, and rhetorical and literary theory—while uniting in their engagement with Ede and Lunsford’s work. Collectively, the book adds a third category to the addressed/invoked binary, an “audience updated,” that takes various professional and cultural forms but is most evidently “audience interacting.” The authors argue not only that audience as a concept in the twenty-first century needs to be readdressed, but also that the varieties of writing opportunities available to today’s students make this discussion newly exciting for writing scholars and teachers. Their combined perspectives provide a helpful guide to incorporating audience awareness much more richly into the contemporary classroom.

Because it can seem so deceptively obvious and yet carry so many meanings, audience is brought up in every composition and communications course in the nation and then, usually, left behind. While Walter Ong’s “The Writer’s Audience Is Always
a Fiction” first addressed the shift in audience constructs from oral to written communication in 1975, most of the work on audience took place in the decade between 1982 and 1992. After Russell Long and then Douglas Park raised the question of the meanings of “audience” (Park), CCC published a special issue on the complexity of identifying audience which included not only AA/AI but also another article by Ede, “Audience: An Introduction to Research.” By 1990, Gesa Kirsch and Duane Roen had compiled the variety of theoretical approaches to audience identification into their collection A Sense of Audience in Written Communication, and then in 1992 James Porter’s Audience and Rhetoric suggested that writers think of audience not as the end recipient of the composing process but as a “discourse community” actively engaged in the writer’s process of identifying with them to build a common text. This more Burkean approach allowed concepts of audience to align with a social constructivist approach to composition.

Since 1992, however, few articles and books, with the notable exception of Rosa Eberly’s Citizen Critics (2000), have explored audience in any depth. As David Beard notes in his chapter for our collection, audience continued to be debated in interpersonal and mass communications, but almost none of that research entered the purview of writing instruction. And as Traci Zimmerman writes in her chapter, literary theorists have debated the intersections of audiences and texts for some time, but again, those insights have not consistently made their way into conversations about textual production. Composition textbooks still encourage writers to “consider their audience” and make generalizations about audience expectations, just as Aristotle recommended to his students 2,500 years ago.

This collection, then, brings together for the first time the breadth of field-knowledge focusing on audience. It also unites theoretical inquiries about audience with practical discussion about using those theories to teach audience to new writers. Finally, in an era when composing pedagogy has expanded beyond the composition class into advanced writing, professional writing, writing for publication, and other courses, and when composing processes have equally expanded into not only word processing but the interactive conversations of online writing, this collection
marks the first time that a discussion of why and how audience is addressed and invoked takes place within these new, twenty-first-century contexts. We hope the collection enriches and enlivens discussions of audience in many fields, including composition and rhetoric, communications, and media studies. It is for you, the teacher and student of audience theory, that this book exists.

No one could be more central to the past twenty-five years of audience theory in composition than Ede, in the Center for Writing and Learning at Oregon State University, and Lunsford, in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Stanford University. As Lee Nickoson-Massey notes in her chapter in this collection, “the influence of AA/AI is present in nearly all work on composing on a sort of subterranean level—it has become so deeply ingrained that it is simply a part of an implicitly shared knowledge of how we conceive of audience” (305). Ede and Lunsford’s follow-up pieces in 1996 and in 2009 (introduced in this volume) add the dynamics of audience diversity and new media interactions to the rhetorical communication triangle between author, text, and audience.

Following the Lunsford and Ede introductory texts are two chapters that place their work into theoretical dialogue with the two fields most often associated with composition studies, literary studies and communication. In “Authors, Audiences, and the Gaps Between,” Traci Zimmerman frames her response to the work on audience by Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes and suggests that the audience is the place where writing is made to have meaning, not merely the point at which a message is delivered. In “Communicating with the Audience,” David Beard argues that the rich empirical tradition of communication studies research gives composition scholars multiple ways to discuss audience response to a text and so enriches student conceptions of audience in their own reading and writing processes. The two chapters together signal the diversity of the composition/rhetoric field in which audience plays a role.

The remainder of the book shows these mingling and diverging streams of audience awareness instantiated in thought and practice throughout writing classrooms. The diversity of classes that focus on composing texts is notable. Not just in first-year composition, not just in English classes, not just with words on
the page but infused across multiple disciplines at multiple levels for multiple genres, writing instruction is ongoing throughout the university and, increasingly, in the links between university and community, or home and school. Rather than try to separate this diverse array into subject-specific subheads, we have instead chosen a more organic arrangement. The attentive reader can follow roughly the path of interests from Lunsford and Ede’s “Audience Addressed” to “Representing Audience” to “Among the Audience”—not with clear breaks in between, but more in the manner of a leaf following a current, swirling into side currents, turning in eddies, then flowing on. In this case, the chapters flow from questions of invoked audience toward issues of audience makeup on into discussions of audience interface.

Thus, there are two chapters examining the addressing of invoked audiences (or the invocation of addressed audiences). The first is “New Media’s Personas and Scenarios” by David Dayton, who argues that procedures created by researchers in information architecture and user experience design are useful for the teaching of audience in the classroom, in particular the creation of a persona—an in-depth psychographic profile of the typical “user,” or audience member—and the scenario, or detailed setting. Similarly, in “Tactician and Strategist,” Robert (Bob) Batchelor advocates writing courses with a more decidedly public relations perspective, focusing on the audience-user of any text and thus turning students into future tacticians and long-term strategic counselors.

Next, in three essays that consider specific instances of “public” writing, Tom Pace describes a semester-long introductory composition course in which student writers collaborate in small groups to develop, write for, and produce their own academic journal. “I Can Take a Stance” draws from interviews with student writers and from a variety of academic journals to show how students gain audience awareness in writing across the curriculum when their audience is the real student-faculty readership of the “journals.” In “When the Teacher Is the Audience,” Marie C. Paretti considers the problems involved in classroom/community partnership, recognizing that students taking part in client projects must shift from performing knowledge to providing information—a shift that can be initially handled by
assigning projects that do not rely on external audiences but on the classroom itself. Finally, Alexandria Peary argues in “The Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope” that an especially effective way of teaching college composition students about audience is to encourage undergraduate publication beyond the university. Grounding her project in activity theory, Peary outlines a first-year course in which students are required to write for publication in external journals.

The shift toward a concern for the diversity of audiences accelerates with the next three chapters. Phyllis Mentzel Ryder, in her chapter “The Stranger Question of Audience,” urges academics, deeply involved as we are in our own often highly specialized discourse communities, to challenge our own notions of audience when teaching. Ryder identifies the rhetorical moves used by writers to sustain publics and shows how these strategies are specifically applied in a service-learning pedagogy with diverse institutions that highlights the very question of audience. In “Moving Audience, Translating Writers, and Negotiating Difference,” Sharon McKenzie Stevens expands upon the multivariate nature of audience theory to argue that the idea of translation has applicability to theorizing audience within unequal but potentially dynamic relationships, especially in the context of cultural difference. Recognizing the power of translation to both increase and alienate audiences, Stevens believes, is particularly important because students, especially culturally marked students, are often urged to shift subjectivities in order to enter into relationships with their audiences. One such culturally marked group is conservative religious students, and Traci Freeman discusses the common problem of working with students who want to support arguments with examples and evidence from their own religious faith. In “Can I Get a Witness: Faith-Based Reasoning and the Academic Audience,” she argues that in order for discussions of audience to be authentic, composition instructors need to do more than ask students to examine their biases; we as compositionists need to examine our own values as part of the larger institutional structure.

Two authors focus particularly on the consequences of the interactive nature of the twenty-first-century audience. Erin Karper expands the notion of audience beyond addressed and in-
voked to include the hybrid audience of Internet communication. “Theorizing Audience in Web-Based Self-Presentation” recognizes that inside and outside the classroom people grapple with issues of audience and appropriateness in Web writing situations both personal and professional. Dan Keller uses a longitudinal study to demonstrate in “Reading Audiences” that the multiple, often conflicting, audience roles caused by students’ multigenre, multimedia reading experiences suggest new challenges in the classroom. Media convergence, blurring the lines between author and audience, provides new opportunities to revisit readers’ agency and help students respond to their multiple roles.

Finally, Lee Nickoson-Massey’s chapter “Writing Assessment as New Literacy” continues the attention on the interactive reading audience while also bringing the whole collection to closure. Nickoson-Massey draws on an ethnographic study of a first-year writing classroom to argue that writing assessment actually forms the basic language, or conduit, students use to read, produce, and respond to written texts. In the context of the class, peer response and, by extension, assessment are forwarded as dynamic and complex rhetorical acts that demonstrate experientially the role of audiences invoked, addressed, and interactive.

The writers in the collection, therefore, approach audience from different perspectives—ones dependent on their own backgrounds, interests, and teaching contingencies. Yet each difference is transcended by the enduring power of Ede and Lunsford’s article from a quarter century ago to evoke agreement, disagreement, and expansion—in short, to invoke an audience in each new generation of compositionists that enters into dialogue with itself across boundaries to forge new understandings of this ancient topic. As Lunsford and Ede put it in their own look back at their work, “Does this mean that we wish to reject the term audience? No, it does not. . . . We continue to believe, then, that the concept of audience provides a helpful theoretical and practical grounding for efforts to understand how texts (and writers and readers) work in today’s world” (Among the Audience 47). As we look over the diversity of ideas and practices in conversation with AA/Al and its tributaries, we cannot but agree.
Preface

Works Cited


PRAXIS STREAMS: AUDIENCE WENDING THROUGH CLASSROOMS AND COMMUNITIES

Scholars Respond to Audiences Addressed and Invoked, Diverse, and Interactive
New Media’s Personas and Scenarios

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If we ask instructors of technical communication to list the top precepts about writing that they teach, most will mention the axiom of rhetoric, both ancient and modern: “Know your audience.” If we then ask the instructors how they teach students to discover and represent knowledge about an audience, most of what they tell us will be covered by this short list of general techniques:

- Worksheets for classifying the audience into primary and secondary readers as well as into types of readers defined by job roles;
- Heuristics for getting students to think about their readers’ background and education, their likely attitudes toward the subject, and their interests and goals related to the information;
- Suggestions for seeking insights by consulting people in the intended audience, or people who can be regarded as proxies for audience members.

These methods reflect the theory of audience that emerged and quickly stabilized during the 1980s as the teaching of technical writing took a rhetorical turn and became a distinct subdiscipline of composition and rhetoric. Emphasizing Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford’s audience addressed, “the concrete reality of the writer’s audience” (“AA/Al” 156), this approach assumes that “knowledge of this audience’s attitudes, beliefs, and expectations is not only possible (via observation and analysis) but essential” (156). Audience invoked, the once-rival view of a writer’s audi-
ence that Ede and Lunsford reconceptualize as complementary, receives attention from technical communication teachers and textbooks indirectly through the basics of document design, workplace and technical writing style, and common genres such as memo and letter reports, how-to instructions, mechanism and process descriptions, formal reports, and others.

This standard approach to treating audience addressed/audience invoked works best with students who have already had work experience that involved substantial writing. The approach is far less successful with students who have only experienced writing in academic contexts because they tend to reify the audience addressed and to use generic outlines as rigidly formulaic templates, invoking in their texts an abstractly conceived, stereotypical representation of the intended audience. How can technical communication instructors help students to imagine their intended audience vividly and concretely and then remain continuously mindful of that audience while planning, drafting, and revising? This is exceedingly difficult for students to accomplish when they are not writing to real audiences and when the only proxies for their imagined audiences are fellow students and their instructor.

In most important workplace writing tasks, a feedback loop informs adjustments to the writing and design of the text; this process helps to bring the audience invoked by a text into sync with the most likely attitudes, perceptions, and reactions of the audience addressed. Toward the end of their landmark essay, Ede and Lunsford describe a feedback loop common in scholarly writing. To provide students in technical communication courses with a semblance of that kind of constructive feedback, instructors of technical communication critique drafts and assign peer reviews—each reviewer acting as a stand-in for the audience addressed in evaluating the matchup with the audience invoked by the text. That is asking a lot of instructors and peer reviewers: to keep a student author’s abstractly imagined audience clearly in mind while evaluating the author’s draft.

In designing assignments for my courses, to make the audience addressed/invoked more real for writers, their peer reviewers, and me—the ultimate evaluator of students’ writing performances—I have adopted the practice of having students create image- and detail-rich stories of vividly imagined persons who represent...
New Media’s Personas and Scenarios

their intended audience. These visual-verbal representations of key audience groups originated and evolved as design artifacts in the world of website designers; they are called by names familiar to scholars of rhetoric and writing: personas and scenarios. I learned to create and value these types of personas and scenarios from experts in plain language writing and information design, consultants who themselves learned to create them while working with multidisciplinary teams to develop websites for large organizations and government agencies.

Interaction designer Alan Cooper is credited with popularizing personas and scenarios, which are now considered standard elements of a user-centered design process for creating all manner of interactive information products. Cooper championed their use in his popular polemic arguing for user-centered technology design, *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum: Why High-Tech Products Drive Us Crazy and How to Restore the Sanity.*

Personas are not real people, but they represent them throughout the design process. They are hypothetical archetypes of actual users. Although they are imaginary, they are defined with significant rigor and precision. Actually, we don’t so much “make up” our personas as discover them as a byproduct of the investigation process. We do, however, make up their names and personal details. (Cooper, *Inmates* 123)

It is now common for teams developing websites and high-tech products to invent personas based on market segmentation data and findings from user research. They distinguish personas based on sets of distinct goals related to the product being designed. After composing the persona documents, which usually include a photograph or illustration, the teams turn their attention to imagining the persona interacting successfully with their product-in-the-making; these brief but detailed narratives are scenarios. By Cooper’s definition, “A scenario is a concise description of a persona using a software-based product to achieve a goal” (*Inmates* 179).

Personas and scenarios have only recently entered the conceptual vocabulary of technical communication, and they have not yet appeared in our textbooks. But they will soon, initially in textbooks teaching user-centered design of websites and on-
line documentation. I have found benefits in using personas and scenarios in all significant information design projects involving advanced undergraduate and graduate students. I have found that having students compose personas and scenarios invigorates their invention and discovery work and enriches their sense of audience throughout the process of writing and design—particularly when they are working in teams.

A Short History of Personas and Scenarios

Alan Cooper developed personas in 1983 as a tool for defining software-user requirements ("Origins"). To gather requirements for a project management application, he interviewed people representing the type of knowledge worker with a use for the tool he envisioned. These interviews were apparently somewhat intense, for Cooper reports that during breaks from writing code he spontaneously began to dialogue with the invoked mental representations of these people. One in particular seemed the perfect archetype of the users he needed to win over with his application, and his play-acting episodes began to focus on conversations with her. She became the prototype for the formalized fictional representations that Cooper later began to develop as a standard procedure for analyzing user groups and their goals. He taught associates of his consulting company to create personas, and in 1998 he revealed this method to the world in The Inmates Are Running the Asylum.

Microsoft researchers Jonathan Grudin and John Pruitt note that personas have their roots in "the abstract user representations" (3) commonly used by marketing analysts; they credit Cooper with enriching the concept and adapting it for design of software and websites. Cooper admits that there are similarities between his personas and the traditional archetypes created by marketers to represent the targeted audiences for products; however, he insists that his personas are distinct in their focus on user goals and in the richness of realistic detail and narrative drama that go into creating them ("Origins"). Everyone agrees that Cooper’s book (Inmates) created a tipping point in the spread
New Media’s Personas and Scenarios

of personas as a design technique among information architects and interaction/interface designers.

The use of scenarios to describe user requirements developed in the early 1990s, promoted by members of that part of the software development community that goes by the name of human-computer interaction (HCI). At an international HCI conference in 1993, Bill Verplank and colleagues urged designers to use scenarios to expand and explore what they knew from their empirical observations of users’ experiences by role-playing through the characters in scenarios, which were defined as “fictional stories, with characters, events, products, and environments” (36). Verplank and colleagues taught that “scenarios put us in another person’s shoes. By developing stories about characters with different characteristics from our own, we are forced to think about the experience of using things from a different point of view” (36). They also stressed the need to make scenarios visual: “The stories always have a visual element—because they are the vehicle for expressing visual design ideas and interactions between people and things” (36). These descriptions of design scenarios by Verplank and colleagues prefigure the development of the personas and scenarios widely used today in the design of websites and many types of products requiring users to interact with computerized information interfaces such as cell phones, MP3 players, and myriad high-end appliances and devices.

When Grudin and Pruitt decided to experiment with persona-centered interface design at Microsoft, they began with Cooper’s concept of personas but tied the selection of user groups and the creation of personas to a rigorous examination of user research data, both quantitative and qualitative. They recorded extensive detailed information about each persona in a central document containing “copious footnotes, comments on specific data, and links to research reports that support and explain the personas’ characteristics” (5). Their “persona team” orchestrated a communication campaign about personas to the entire product development team through “posters, flyers, handouts, and giveaways (e.g., squeeze toys with persona images and information)” (6). They also used email, including email sent to developers from the personas themselves. Grudin and Pruitt admit that such campaigns can lead
to “persona mania,” and warn against their overuse: “Personas are not a panacea. They should augment and enhance—augment existing design processes and enhance user focus” (8).

Echoing both Cooper and Verplank and colleagues, Grudin and Pruitt compare the persona-driven design process to method acting. “A character is fiction, but the behavior is based on real data” (149). Whitney Quesenbery, influential information design consultant and past president of the Usability Professionals’ Association, who has a bachelor’s degree in theatre, teaches a persona-centered approach to user-centered design that has much in common with the one developed at Microsoft. I follow the general outline of her method in teaching personas and scenarios to my students. The interaction design textbook by Cooper and Reimann presents essentially the same steps:

◆ Collecting and analyzing data on users, their tasks, and their contexts of use
◆ Identifying primary and secondary user groups based on differences such as job function, level of experience, usage patterns, and, especially, the most important goals in using the product
◆ Creating the profile of a single user who will represent each user group: one set of distinct demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral characteristics
◆ Adding a realistic life story to create personas based on the user profiles, checking the accretion of details against data from the real users in the group the persona is meant to represent as an archetype
◆ Creating vivid mini-stories depicting the personas using the product

Why Personas and Scenarios Have Caught on

Real-world design teams use personas and scenarios because they

◆ Condense, organize, and clarify findings from marketing and user research into a coherent vision of users and their goals
◆ Allow that vision to be communicated compellingly to everyone with a stake in making the product a success
Quesenbery notes that the chronological structure and agent-action thrust of storytelling help us encapsulate our understanding of causality and correlations. “As a communication tool, stories let one person persuade many. . . . Storytelling ignites the listener’s creativity” (6). In commenting on the power of storytelling as a design tool, Grudin and Pruitt note how naturally and well it fits with our everyday ways of thinking collectively:

From birth or soon thereafter, every day of our lives, we use partial knowledge to draw inferences, make predictions, and form expectations about the people around us. We are not always right, but we learn from experience. We continue to extrapolate. Personas evoke this universal capability and bring it into the design process. (4)

Another Synthesis for the Addressed/Invoked Dialectic

Personas and scenarios encapsulate the dialectic about real and imaginary readers that forms a leitmotif running through our field’s theorizing about a writer’s sense of audience. Personas and scenarios reconcile the dialectic between audience addressed and audience invoked, a thesis-antithesis whose synthesis is direct communication with users: Robert R. Johnson’s “audience involved.” Personas and scenarios synthesize all three views of audience; using them, writers enter the world of user-experience design:

◆ Involving the audience in the planning stage through user research, including contextual inquiry and other methods involving firsthand observation and communication

◆ Addressing the needs and interests of niche audiences through concretely felt identification with distinct personas and their specific goals

◆ Invoking these representatives of targeted audience subgroups in every aspect of information and interaction design
Audience theory in technical communication has already conceived of personas on both sides of our texts and hypertexts. Coney and Steehouder wrote of the need for Web designers to consider the best match between a site’s authorial persona and the primary user personas. Jonathan Price also describes this persona-to-persona approach to writing and information design (32–34), a perspective certain to become more prominent in technical communication as Web content development becomes a core component of our curricula.

Textbooks in Web writing, website design, and human-computer interaction have already begun to include step-by-step instructions in how to create personas and scenarios, including examples (Redish; Cooper and Reimann; Garrett; Wodtke; Brinck, Gergle, and Wood). Professors teaching Web design, online documentation, and multimedia will naturally be among the early adopters of this innovative audience-analysis method. Some of us are already having our students compose personas and scenarios in these types of classes. We need studies looking into the impact of these methods on students’ experience of the audience analysis method and how the method appears to affect the information products they design.

Will this method, or some variation of it, benefit students analyzing audiences in business and technical writing service courses? Can the method be adapted for use in courses focused on certain genres of expository writing, such as science writing, environmental writing, and advanced technical writing? These and sundry other provocative questions await reports from teacher-researchers.

In technical communication, we already teach our students to identify actual members of the target audience, gather information about these people and relate it to their goals for the information being designed, and observe, if at all possible, members of the intended audience doing the work that requires the information being designed. What has been missing from our approach to analyzing audiences is the middle of the three approaches elaborated by Karen Schriver in *Dynamics in Document Design*: classification-driven, intuition-driven, and feedback-driven. In our teaching of audience in technical communication, we have added the feedback-driven approach to the classification-driven
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approach, but we lack easily describable methods and tools for linking the audiences that our students define through heuristic procedures to the projected audiences created by their texts, the fitness of which can be reliably validated only by gathering feedback from actual members of the target audience. I conceive of both audience addressed and audience invoked as operative only through the intuition-driven approach; in both cases, the material that the imagination and intuition work on is knowledge distilled from observation and experience.

Putting It into Practice: The MiViP Handout Assignment

In my current position, I teach a course each fall semester introducing master’s students to technical writing and information design. In a recent version of the course, I had the students work in groups on the first of three projects and then gave them the option of working alone or together on the other two projects. (Only one student out of the ten chose to go solo on the other two projects.) The first project was to create a handout about the Microsystems-based Visual Prosthesis, or MiViP (Delbeke and colleagues). I provided all the source information for the handout: a PDF copy of a no-longer-available website about the MiViP, a conference proceedings paper, and a more recent two-page fact sheet with an illustration of the MiViP concept.

The audience for the handout to be developed by the students consisted of people attending a technical presentation by one of the MiViP project scientists; his talk was slated to precede a panel discussion on biomedical ethics. That context, my instructions for the assignment noted, would attract many people with minimal interest in the technical details about the MiViP but with some interest in understanding generally how the device works and in knowing key facts about the project. The purpose of the handout was to give an overview of the MiViP project before the presentation and follow-up panel discussion got under way.

I introduced the class to the project by distributing a one-page description of the case problem, which we read together to spark a discussion aimed at clarifying their understanding of the rhetorical situation. We considered a number of reasonable
assumptions about the audience and production constraints: the pros and cons of various formats and software options; what images could be obtained and how they might be modified; the use of color, images, and printing methods. Working in groups of three or four, the students then met to exchange contact information and figure out how they would collaborate online.

The first project milestone I set was to create at least two personas with corresponding scenarios. Each group decided to have at least two group members create a draft persona and scenario, which those students posted to the course website and discussed in the following week’s class meeting. I had lectured on personas and scenarios and had provided them with links to Web pages and PDF documents containing a variety of sample personas and scenarios, most of which are available on the Web—nonacademic instructional texts for specialists in usability and user-experience design.

I divided the class of ten students into three groups (four, three, and three). Group A (four students) and group C decided to produce a three-fold brochure for the MiViP handout, while Group B went with an unfolded page printed on both sides. While the draft personas and scenarios created by all three groups demonstrated basic understanding of those artifacts’ generic elements, some personas were short on specific details, which is often the case with first efforts at writing personas. To Cooper, details are essential for effective personas:

That’s because personas lose elasticity as they become specific. For example, we don’t just say that Emilee uses business software. We say that Emilee uses WordPerfect version 5.1 to write letters to Gramma. . . . As we isolate Emilee with specific, idiosyncratic detail, a remarkable thing happens: She becomes a real person in the minds of the designers and programmers. We can refer to her by name, and she assumes a tangible solidity that puts all of our design assumptions in perspective. As she loses her elasticity, we can identify her skills, her motivations, and what she wants to achieve. (Inmates 128)

Real-world persona writers often do not place as much emphasis on concrete details as Cooper advocates. Indeed, the personas and scenarios produced by information architects, interaction
New Media’s Personas and Scenarios
designers, and usability professionals are quite varied, suggesting that the genre-formation of these design artifacts would make an interesting study. I encourage my students to follow the persona and scenario guidelines and examples developed by Quesenbery. However, I expose students to a variety of examples illustrating different levels of detail, organization, and visual display in personas and scenarios.

I have found that students tend to like writing personas more than they like writing scenarios; they find it easier to put themselves in creative writing mode when describing the characters representing subgroups of their audience than they do in writing brief narratives depicting these people using the information product being designed. Their first efforts at writing a scenario are often sketchy descriptions of what the persona would expect, or they may opt for a model of a persona in which the scenario is replaced by a bullet-point list of goals and expectations relative to the information product.

In reviewing students’ draft personas and scenarios, I encourage them to think like fiction writers. I stress that their goal is to make their personas realistically compelling and to tie the personas’ goals directly to specific aspects of the design concept that the group has begun to flesh out. All three groups in the master’s class produced solid personas and scenarios, though the personas were more detailed and persuasive than the scenarios. Figure 6.1 presents an image of a sample persona created by a student for the MiViP project. I have added a scenario to illustrate the type of mini-story that I encourage students to emulate when writing scenarios to go with the personas they create.

In addition to the portfolio of projects that groups handed in at the end of the course, each student delivered an individually composed essay reporting and reflecting on what they experienced and learned from the projects. In the first part of this essay, they summarized what they experienced with regard to group dynamics, interaction, and division of responsibilities. They also recounted the story behind the development of each of the three projects and compared their group’s products to those presented by the other groups. They ended the essay with a reflective account of what they most valued about what they had learned, what had caused them the most frustration, how they thought they might
apply what they had learned, and what future learning goals, if any, the course had led them to set for themselves.

My guidance for writing this essay directed students to provide details about how the teams divided the work on each project. Though the assignment instructions did not mention personas and scenarios, the students’ reports mentioned them frequently because drafting the personas and scenarios had been the first

**Figure 6.1. A sample persona created by a student.**
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step in the design process I had them follow. All but one of the
ten students reported taking a turn at creating personas and
scenarios, and some students reported having specialized in this
task. To my surprise, none of the students expressed the slight-
est skepticism about the usefulness of this method for analyzing
audiences. That contrasts with previous experiences I had had
teaching online documentation and Web design classes in which
students worked alone on a major project. In those classes, stu-
dents’ first reactions to personas and scenarios were marked by
muted resistance, grudgingly accepting them as part of the formal
planning report—which itself seemed mainly to be seen as an
academic ritual of procedural correctness.

One student from a Web design class I taught wrote the fol-
lowing in a formal online discussion about personas, after the
class had been through the experience of creating personas for
their planning reports:

In every course I’ve taken in technical communication, I have
been told the following things, incidentally, that I already
knew: research and analyze your audience before creating any
communication and if the information gathered can be quali-
fied and quantified, that would be optimum. The creating of
personas and scenarios appears to fly in the face of this pre-
emptive TCOM doctrine, so I had to question this. Isn’t it better
to find and design for real people in real, everyday situations
at the outset, rather than to design fictional people in fictional
contexts at the outset?

Though many students in those previous classes seemed ini-
tially skeptical about the method’s value, I received no negative
feedback about personas and scenarios after students had actually
created them, and I received numerous positive comments about
them, both in classroom conversations and in messages posted to
the bulletin board in the Web design class, which was taught on-
line. In fact, the student whose skeptical question is quoted above
made a turnaround in attitude that was typical. After creating and
using personas and scenarios in designing a website for an actual
client, she became convinced of their value. She ended her post
this way: “When all is said and done, the use of personas and
scenarios is very useful for me as I approach my website designs
in this class. It forces me to focus on prospective users and not solely on designer assumptions.”

I have observed two general patterns about students’ reactions to creating personas and scenarios. First, the more workplace writing experience students have, the more skeptical they are likely to be about the usefulness of creating personas and scenarios. And second, students working in pairs or groups on a project come to see the value of personas and scenarios more quickly than those working alone.

The strongly skeptical statement quoted above, for example, was written by a student who had been a broadcast journalist for a major news network; she had years of writing experience in journalism, public relations, and marketing. Her initial skepticism contrasts sharply with the attitude described below by a student who had little experience in writing for real-world audiences:

When I first started working with the MiViP material, I felt overwhelmed because the content was very technical. I wasn’t sure what to include in the brochure because there was so much information. Fortunately though, the personas came in handy, and I learned my first important skill: selecting appropriate content for the target audience. My past writing experiences didn’t really require that I select details for a particular audience; usually, I selected details to meet a specific purpose. I am distinguishing the two because this project forced me to consider what information the reader needed and wanted to know, whereas my previous writing tasks focused around answering a question the way I saw fit. With these [project] documents, however, it wasn’t about answering a question or proving a point; it was about presenting material that meets the audience members’ needs.

In the class experienced by the student just quoted, the personas and scenarios proved particularly effective at getting teams to construct a shared vision of key audience groups and keeping teams focused on meeting the needs of their personas. The students in that class recognized how personas and scenarios helped MiViP project teams in particular, as shown by these excerpts from two end-of-term reports:
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1. The first decision we made for the MiViP handout was to determine who our audience was. Day and I both created two personas and the group picked the best two out of the four. These ended up being an advocate for the blind and a student of ophthalmology. Then we started to design a handout that met the needs of both of our personas. As a group, we were very pleased with how the brochure turned out. This handout meets the requirements of the professor and the needs of our personas.

2. Lori and Chris wrote the final MiViP personas that we used. I suggested the National Institutes of Health (NIH) as the place of employment for one of the personas. I looked up NIH online to make sure it was still in business. Chris then created Tufano, an NIH researcher. As a usability test, I took the prototype to work with me and got some feedback from a respected colleague, who is in the targeted age bracket as our personas. His ideas were useful and confirmed my feelings about the brochure. I felt that we were on the right track.

Creating personas and scenarios is a way to bring imagination and intuition more forcefully into our analysis and invention of audiences. To try out this new storytelling paradigm, we must teach our students to think more like novelists and psychologists and less like accountants and engineers as they articulate who they think their audiences are and what those people would expect and want. By teaching our students to create personas and scenarios, we motivate them to break out of stereotypical thinking and imagine, instead of types, real people—unique, interesting, emotional, and ultimately interested only in getting quickly whatever it is they wanted that brought them to the interface or document that we have so thoughtfully designed especially for them.

Works Cited


New Media’s Personas and Scenarios


This collection builds upon Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford’s groundbreaking work to examine the rhetorical concept of audience as it relates to twenty-first century teaching and learning. Editors M. Elizabeth Weiser, Brian M. Fehler, and Angela M. González bring together compositionists from the departments of English, communications, public relations, and writing to offer insights that serve as a guide for incorporating audience awareness into the contemporary classroom.


Through these engagements, contributors offer insights on audience from divergent perspectives—composition pedagogy, new media studies, service learning and professional writing, diversity, and rhetorical and literary theory—that establish a third category in the addressed/invoked binary, an “audience updated” that takes various professional and cultural forms but is most evidently “audience interacting.”