"This is the type of audience I've learned to write to my whole life": Exploring Student Perspectives about Writing for Different Types of Audiences

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Abstract: In this study at a research-intensive public university, a group of eight instructors across a range of disciplines designed a writing assignment in which students (n=104) chose to write to one of three audiences—the teacher, a novice, or an adjacent expert. Students were then asked to complete a questionnaire that included open-ended questions about why they chose a particular audience and why they thought writing to different audiences was or was not valuable. This study design allowed us to answer three questions: (a) do students value writing to different audiences? (b) if so, why? and (c) how are students' perspectives about writing to an audience of their choice connected to their perceived engagement and their perceptions of the assignment's ease? Unexpectedly, writing for the instructor was the most commonly selected option of our participants—a decision students made based in part on their perceptions of relative ease and familiarity of the task and audience. Yet, at the same time, participants valued being asked to write for different types of audiences, in part because they saw other audiences as stretching their rhetorical skills. Of note, too, was the fact that students rarely referred to grading as a motive for their choice. Quantitative analysis confirms that students' choice of audience was not based on an inherent sense that one audience type was easier to write for than others. These findings inform ongoing conversations about writing-to-learn, writing transfer, and anti-racist teaching.

Instructors across disciplines are charged with preparing students for their future careers by teaching them critical skills that will extend beyond their experiences in the classroom. Because a good deal of learning occurs through the activities and assignments students complete over the course of a semester, it is imperative that such activities are designed in meaningful ways. One way to achieve this in written assignments is by having students address audiences other than the teacher and for purposes beyond demonstrating to their instructor that they understand the material. Such opportunities to extend audience awareness may help students adapt better to the kinds of writing that more closely match what they will be doing once they move beyond the undergraduate academic

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setting. Unfortunately, previous research indicates that students are typically asked to complete writing assignments that are limited in purpose and scope.

Previous scholarship of writing for various audiences and purposes has often focused on instructor perspectives and activities, with an aim of providing actionable recommendations to help teachers design better assignments for their students (Melzer, 2014). Scholarship like that of Eodice, Geller, and Lerner (2016) has explored the value of audiences from the perspective of students completing such writing assignments. Within this general context, we wondered: Do students find it valuable to write to different audiences? And if so, why?

This study aimed to answer this question by exploring associations between students' perspectives about writing to different audiences, their engagement, and their perception of assignment ease. To do so, we (a group of instructors in a variety of disciplines at a public, research-intensive university) developed writing assignments in which students were given a choice to write to one of three audiences—the teacher, a novice, or an adjacent expert[1]—and then completed a questionnaire that included open-ended questions about why they chose that audience and why they thought writing to different audiences was or was not valuable. Responses were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed to help fill previous gaps in the literature, offering a better understanding of how the students themselves experience and value writing to different audiences and for different purposes.

Previous Research: What Are the "Right" Audiences for Writing Assignments?

Writing assignments are often designed as a way for students to demonstrate to their instructor that they have learned course material. This type of audience—especially when it is connected to testing contexts like short-answer essays—has been referred to in previous research as writing to the "instructor-as-examiner" (Melzer, 2014, pp. 34-35) and has been criticized for asking students to "simply parrot information in a limited and monotonous rhetorical setting" (Russell, 2002). Although such assignments may allow teachers to assess student understanding of content, this form of instructor-as-examiner writing does not provide access to the types of writing students will do once they begin their careers, nor does it necessarily enable students to gain from writing-to-learn approaches (McLeod, 2011; Kiefer et. al, 2000-2021) that can help students deepen content understanding through writing.

Melzer (2014) argues that challenging students to write to hypothetical audiences rather than the instructor helps introduce students to their disciplines and positions them as members of a broader discourse community. In his popular guide to teaching writing across the curriculum, *Engaging Ideas,* Bean (2011) asserts that having students write to the instructor-as-examiner puts them in an "unnatural rhetorical position" (p. 84) and so advises instructors to design writing assignments that encourage students to write to diverse audiences in a variety of rhetorical settings. For example, he suggests instructors could ask students to write from a position of power by explaining information to someone who knows less about the topic than the writer, such as a fellow student who missed class. Another possible audience is that of an expert in a field adjacent to the student's own—such as a successful lawncare specialist who applies herbicides but may not deeply understand how they work biochemically. In WAC/WID settings, then, one line of thought suggests that designing assignments that encourage students to think effortfully about how to frame information for audiences with varying amounts of knowledge about a topic can help students grow into more effective communicators than would be possible if all writing assignments are written to the same audience (the instructor) from the same rhetorical position.

Additionally, some scholars (e.g., Pemberton, 1995) argue that assignments in which students address the instructor-as-examiner perpetuate a "banking" model of teaching (Freire, 1970), in which the teacher's goal is to check that inert knowledge has been transferred from the brain of teacher to the brains of students. Yet, such a model fails to see that "writing does not work in one way, with one set of effects, but in many ways, with many and varied effects" (Russell, 2001, p. 260) depending on the context and genre in which a text functions. Rather, expressive writing (to self) and poetic writing (creative/literary writing) should be seen as valuable because they also provide opportunities for students to engage with the contextual complexities of communication and knowledge-making. Too, as Fishman et. al (2005) have suggested, embodied performative textual products can serve as a "vehicle for helping students to transfer literacy skills from situation to situation" (p. 227). By positioning students in expressive, performative, and argumentative ways, writing assignments may move students beyond knowledge demonstration and instead encourage them to make deeper connections, solve problems, and think critically about their discipline.

In contrast to advocates for hypothetical and non-instructor audiences for student writing, other scholars remain skeptical of the benefits of writing to such audiences (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Geisler, 1994; Paretti, 2008; Spinuzzi, 1996). For them, the value of writing to different audiences in simulated contexts is limited because it is still not adequately real, meaning that students may not activate or learn genre knowledge to the degree suggested by Melzer and others. Instead, because these situations are hypothetical and artificial, students may not feel that they have real authority or ability to actively contribute to disciplinary knowledge-making.

Providing a different perspective, Eodice, Geller, and Lerner (2016) aggregated over 2,000 university seniors' responses to a questionnaire about the writing they found most meaningful during their undergraduate experience. Participants in this study described writing projects as meaningful across a broad range of courses, as well as beyond course settings. The authors conclude that there is no one set of essential components of a writing assignment that will encourage active participation from all students. Instead, they suggest faculty should design assignments that give students a sense of agency by providing choices that invite them to write in diverse ways. Further, the study suggested that students found writing meaningful when they felt a sense of passion about the topics they saw as relevant to their current or future selves and when they felt an effective balance of freedom and guidance for the writing task.

Further research into student perceptions is informative because it can provide insight into the functions and merits of writing assignments beyond instructors' evaluations of the quality of their own assignments or their students' writing. Yet, as Cook-Sather (2003) notes, recent studies focused on students' experiences of writing assignments remain relatively rare.

Project Rationale and Design

As a group of instructors from various disciplines who are compelled by claims that writing can support both learning and communicative goals, we believe that student perspectives about audience type and choice should be an important consideration in our future assignment design. Our interest in this issue guided us to focus on the following research questions:

1. Do students value having a choice of audience in writing assignments?
2. How are students' views about audience impacted by their rationale for their choice of audience and by the ways in which they value writing to diverse audiences?

3. What relationships exist among students' perceptions of level of engagement and level of ease of the task (including student characteristics/academic demographics) in relation to writing to a variety of audiences?

In order to address our research questions, we focused on the following concepts:

- **Engagement.** Student engagement has many definitions in academia with most definitions including students' and institutions' investments of time, energy, and resources used to optimize and enhance student learning (Kuh et al., 2008, Kahu, 2013; Lester, 2013; Trowler, 2013). Although we had this definition in mind while developing the student questionnaire, students in this study were not given a definition of engagement and thus report their individual interpretation of how engaged they felt by the writing assignment.
- **Ease of Task.** This aspect of the assignment can be interpreted as the level of ease that students experienced while completing the written assignment. In this study, the perception of ease was measured with a Likert-like question ("How easy did you find it to write for the audience you chose?"); later, a qualitative code (*ease*) was also developed for student responses to open-ended questions on the questionnaire.
- **Rationale for Choice.** The reasoning behind a student's choice for selecting a specific audience for the written assignment was termed Rationale for Choice and assessed by coding student responses to an open-ended question.
- **Value of Diverse Audiences.** To assess how students perceived the value of writing to different target audiences, we asked students an open-ended question and coded their responses as Value of Diverse Audiences.

As noted above, our research focused on three audience types, based on Melzer's (2014) adaptation of Britton's (1975) audience categories[2]. Sample prompts, which illustrate how these audience types were embedded across our very different courses, are provided in Appendix A.

1. **Instructor as inspector:** These prompts asked students to demonstrate their knowledge of the course content to the instructor, typically in the form of a summary and without extensive additional guidance about purpose or audience. For these prompts, the audience was the teacher, serving as an inspector of the students' work. Our adoption of "instructor as inspector" reflects a sort of middle ground between Melzer's "instructor as examiner" and "instructor (general)" categories: The prompts did more than merely request regurgitation of a single, correct answer (*i.e.*, the very limited rhetorical task captured by Melzer's "instructors as examiner" category), but they were designed to imply a limited rhetorical situation in which the primary purpose was to produce work for inspection by a more knowledgeable reader acting primarily within a classroom context rather than a broader disciplinary setting. We believe that many writing assignments across disciplines implicitly create this kind of audience, and we were interested to explore how students invented and perceived this common but invisible classroom context.
2. **Novice:** These prompts asked students to convey course content to a hypothetical peer who had less knowledge about the subject matter than the writer had.
3. **Adjacent expert:** These prompts asked students to convey course content to a hypothetical expert in a field similar or related to the course's content (i.e., someone with extensive knowledge but not about the focal content of the course). We envisioned the adjacent expert as located between the instructor and the peer

in terms of their existing knowledge about the content the student was asked to write about.

While we focus in this study on the rhetorical component of audience, we acknowledge that the purpose and genre of students' writing also shifted depending on the audience they choose to write for.

Participants and Courses

The eight instructors who participated in this study are situated in diverse disciplines (see Table 1)[3]. As a result, the prompts designed by each instructor varied because they were specific to the content and audiences relevant to their courses. We chose this approach, instead of using identical prompts across all courses, because we felt that maintaining contextual validity was more important than a standardized assignment design.

A total of 152 students across the eight courses were invited to participate in this study; 68.4% of these students agreed to do so, producing a sample size of $n = 104$ (Table 1). Although the responses were aggregated across all courses in the analysis, we acknowledge that the diversity of course types and levels included in this study, as well as the relatively small sample size, limits the generalizability of this work.

Table 1: Course-Level Information

Instructor (years teaching)	Subject/ Discipline[4]	Division[5]	Participants (Course size)	Approximate length of student texts
Instructor 1 (>15)	Art Education	Upper-division (Y)	16 (17)	500 words
Instructor 2 (5-9)	Communication	Upper-division/Grad (N)	9 (16)	100-200 words
Instructor 3 (>15)	Composition Studies	Graduate (Y)	12 (15)	300-400 words
Instructor 4 (>15)	Disability Studies	Lower-division (Mixed)	16 (29)	2-3 pages
Instructor 5 (<5)	Educational Research (online)	Graduate (N)	3 (14)	400-500 words
Instructor 6 (<5)	ESL Composition	Lower-division (N)	12 (16)	500 words
Instructor 7 (5-9)	Life Sciences	Lower-division (Y)	29 (37)	1-2 pages
Instructor 8 (5-9)	Soil Science	Upper-division (N)	7 (8)	250-400 words

Assignments and Follow-up Questionnaire

As a priming step for the study, each instructor created three separate assignments in which students wrote for only one of the three audience types (the instructor-as-inspector, a novice, and an adjacent expert). The aim of these three preparatory tasks was to reduce the potential confounding influence of audience novelty on our results. Although many of these students may have been exposed to these audience types in previous courses, we sought to ensure that students were familiar with each audience within the context of the courses in this study.

After assigning students this series of three separate assignments, instructors then gave an assignment in which students were provided with three different prompts about the same content (one for each target audience); thus, students on this fourth assignment were able to choose the audience they wanted to write to. All of these assignments (i.e., the three preparatory assignments as well as the audience choice assignment) counted as minor grades in each course, and students' decision whether to participate in the study had no effect on their assignment or course grade. The timing of the assignments differed across courses, but in all cases the full set of assignments were spread across several weeks in each course.

After completing the audience choice assignment, students were invited to participate in this study; those who agreed then completed a questionnaire about their perspectives on the writing assignment. This design was approved (as exempt) by our university's Institutional Review Board.

Employing a concurrent mixed methods design (Ivankova, 2015), our qualitative and quantitate analyses focused on five questions from the questionnaire[6]:

> **Overall Value (Yes/No).** Participants were asked whether they thought it was valuable (in general) to be asked to write to different kinds of audiences.
>
> **Level of Task Engagement (Likert).** Participants were asked how engaged they were when writing to their chosen audience using a four-point scale with the following response options: very engaged, mostly engaged, moderately engaged, and not very engaged.
>
> **Level of Task Ease (Likert).** Participants were asked how easy they found it to write to their chosen audience using a four-point scale with the following response options: quite easy, fairly easy, fairly hard, and quite hard.
>
> **Rationale for Choice (Open-ended).** Participants were asked: "In at least three sentences, explain WHY you chose the option you did. What appealed to you about that choice, and/or what didn't appeal to you about the other options?"
>
> **Value of Diverse Audiences (Open-ended).** Participants responded to the following: "In at least three sentences, explain why you think it is (or is not) valuable to be asked to write for different kinds of audiences."

To gain a sense of students' perceptions of the relative ease of and engagement with the writing exercise, the two Likert-item questions were assessed using cumulative link models (Agresti, 2019; Christensen, 2018; Mangiafico, 2016). These models allowed us to explore interrelationships among the course level (undergrad or grad), the course division (humanities, social science, or STEM), the course make-up (non-majors, majors, or mixed), students' reported level of engagement in the writing task, students' perception of the task ease, and the audience they chose to write for.

For each full model, Likelihood Ratio Tests determined which variables in the model were significant (Christensen, 2018). All significant variables were then tested for pair-wise comparison using Estimated Marginal Means for multiple comparisons with Tukey's HSD Test adjustment (Mangiafico, 2016). All models met the proportional odds assumptions required for cumulative link models. All Likert-item analyses were conducted using the *clm* function in the ordinal package (Christensen, 2018) in R Statistical Software (R Core Team, 2018). Appendix B provides additional information about these models.

For the open-ended responses we approached the qualitative data iteratively (and in line with Saldaña, 2016), using pre-coding; concept, pattern, and focused coding; analytical memos; and group discussion throughout the process to help move the team towards interpretative convergence. A partial codebook of the ten most frequently occurring codes is provided in Table 2, and the full codebook is included as Appendix C.

Table 2: Partial Codebook: Top Ten Codes (in Alphabetical Order)

Label	Code	Definition
Choice	Appreciating option to select among audiences	A reference to a value for being able to choose an audience (for the writer and/or for others in the course)
Diverse	Responding to diverse audiences	A reference to a recognition that the writer does or will need to interact with/adapt to various audiences. Focused on the recipients/audiences/readers.
Ease	Considering ease/difficulty	A reference to the relative ease or difficulty of options
Fam	Choosing familiarity	A reference to audiences/tasks/content that feel known/safe/comfortable
Flex	Becoming more flexible (generally)	A reference to multiple audiences as making the writer more adaptable/flexible. Focused on the writer without direct reference to any specific audience.
Gen-Com Skills	Developing "skills"/style/voice	A reference to building writing skills, NOT directed towards a specific audience or audience impact. (A generic reference, undifferentiated/unfocused on type of skill)
Impact	Recognizing an impact of their writing on an audience	A reference to the ability to impact or persuade the audience – to make a change in the audience's understanding/view. Driven by consideration for the audience.
Learn	Considering oneself as a learner	A reference to a goal of teaching oneself the course content through the writing task (including remembering/comprehending course material)
Relate	Making writing accessible/relatable for specific audience	A reference to how ideas can best be framed for the audience(s): Considering how to say it (referring to features within the text)
Relev-Fut	Seeing future relevance	A reference to student seeing future or career relevance for the task or audience

After developing and refining our codebook, pairs of researchers individually coded each open-ended comment with up to three most-salient codes from this list. This paired approach to coding, plus team reconciliation of disagreements and additional memoing after first-cycle coding, allowed us to move towards the propositions reported in the discussion section. Frequency counts of codes formed the initial basis for our qualitative analysis, allowing us to identify the most common codes and allowing us to triangulate our findings via mixed methods.

Because the frequency values represent the proportion of the total number of students (*n*=104) or the number of students in a given group who were assigned each code, frequency values sum to greater than one hundred percent. For many of the results that follow, we use the notation *ns* to indicate the number of students who selected a certain response or whose comments were coded with a specific label.

Interpretation of Data

In response to the yes/no question about the value of being asked to write for different kinds of audiences, the overwhelming majority (97%; *ns*=101) of students responded affirmatively: they did think it was valuable to be asked to write for different audiences. Additionally, most students found the assignment both easy and engaging: the majority (88.5%; *ns*=92) of students found the writing assignment to be "Fairly Easy" or "Quite Easy," and most students (75%; *ns*=78) reported being "Very Engaged" or "Mostly Engaged" when answering the writing prompt.

Engagement and Ease: Quantitative Analysis

Given current literature establishing links between motivation and student engagement in learning (e.g., Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007; Sawers et al., 2016; Yin & Wang, 2016), we were interested in the influence of students' reported engagement in the task on other quantitative and qualitative elements of their responses.

The cumulative link model that assessed engagement showed that students' reported Level of Engagement in the writing task had weak but statistically significant relationships with three variables: Level of Ease, Major (i.e., whether the course enrollment was primarily students majoring in the course content area), and Division. (Appendix B provides statistical output for our cumulative link model analyses, including *p*-values for each aspect of each model.)

Post-hoc analyses indicated significant differences in the Level of Engagement between Quite Easy and Fairly Hard ($p=0.01$) and between Quite Easy and Fairly Easy ($p=0.02$), but not for any other pairwise comparisons for student Level of Ease in the writing task. For the model assessing Level of Ease, we found only Level of Engagement to be significant. Post-hoc testing did not distinguish between any pair-wise comparison for this variable regarding Level of Ease.

Figure 1 illustrates these trends among student perceptions of engagement and ease; in general terms, most students were engaged by the task and found it adequately complex (i.e., neither too hard nor too easy).

Regarding students' major (i.e., whether the course was required for students' major or degree program), post-hoc tests did not distinguish between any pairwise comparisons ($p > 0.05$) for Level of Engagement (even though Major was significant in the overall model assessing Level of Engagement). However, the variable Division showed a significant difference between Humanities and STEM disciplines ($p = 0.002$) based on students' level of engagement in the writing task, with lower reported Level of Engagement in STEM courses.

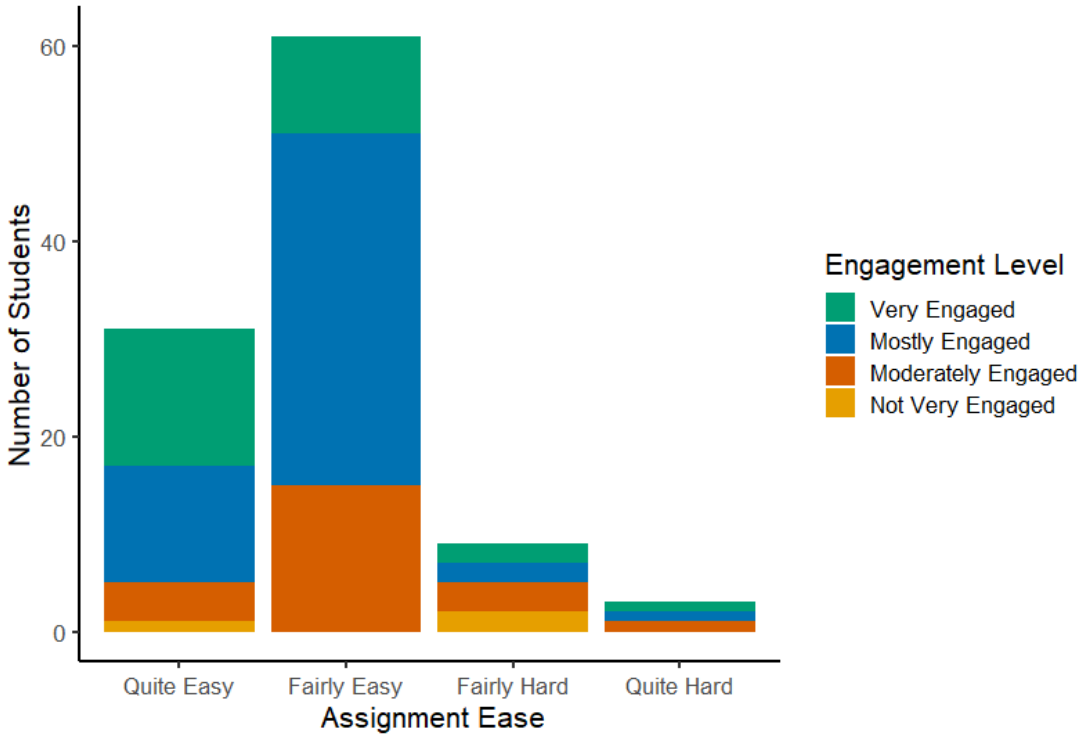

Figure 1: Students' reported Level of Engagement with perceived Ease of Task, based on Likert-item questions.

To summarize this quantitative analysis, we reiterate four noteworthy points. First, students' reported engagement was weakly related to their perception of the easiness of the writing assignment, the division of the course, or whether the course was required. Students in STEM courses reported lower levels of engagement than those in humanities or social science courses (with only students in humanities courses being significantly more engaged than the STEM courses). Second, students' perception of the task ease was not correlated to any of the other model variables except their reported level of engagement—but this correlation was not found to be significant for any specific level of ease. These first two points suggest that there were relationships between perceived task easiness, students' reported engagement, and the content of the course, but that those relationships were not especially strong. Third, though the correlations were not especially strong, we find it valuable to note that most students (75%) reported being "mostly engaged" or "very engaged" in the writing task they selected.

Finally, the Audience Option (instructor as inspector, novice, or adjacent expert) selected by the student was not correlated with any other factor in the study, including Level of Ease or Level of Engagement. This last point is important because it indicates that students did not perceive one audience option as automatically or inherently more engaging or easier to write for. Instead, as discussed below, students' engagement with the writing activity was based on personal, qualitative judgments related to other elements of the task.

Open-Ended Responses: Qualitative Trends

Why did students choose to write for one audience instead of another? And, why did they find it valuable to write for diverse audiences? Our coding of open-ended responses points towards some tentative answers to these questions. A total of 236 codes were assigned to the participant responses

explaining their Rationale for Choice, and 242 codes were assigned to responses for Value of Diverse Audiences. Table 3 (ordered alphabetically) shows the frequency with which the codes were applied to the open-ended responses regarding Rationale for Choice and for Value of Diverse Audiences. The five most frequently occurring codes for each open-ended question are bolded.

Table 3: Frequency Counts for Coding of Open-Ended Responses

Code	Q1: Rationale for Choice		Q2: Value of Diverse Audiences	
	Frequency (count)	Frequency[7] (% of participants, N=104)	Frequency (count)	Frequency (% of participants, N=104)
CHOICE	4	3.8%	18	17.3%
CREATE	8	7.7%	6	5.8%
DIVERSE	3	2.9%	40	**38.5%**
EASE	51	**49.0%**	7	6.7%
FAM	34	**32.7%**	4	3.8%
FLEX	0	0.0%	25	**24.0%**
GEN-COM	6	5.8%	23	**22.1%**
GRADE	2	1.9%	3	2.9%
HYPOTH	7	6.7%	1	1.0%
IMPACT	18	**17.3%**	9	8.7%
JOY	12	11.5%	0	0.0%
LEARN	15	**14.4%**	15	14.4%
PERSP	1	1.0%	15	14.4%
PREFER	13	12.5%	0	0.0%
PUSH	7	6.7%	3	2.9%
REAL	7	6.7%	11	10.6%
RELATE	22	**21.2%**	25	**24.0%**
RELEV-FUT	7	6.7%	21	**20.2%**
RELEV-NOW	6	5.8%	4	3.8%
SELECT	6	5.8%	8	7.7%
UNFAM	7	6.7%	4	3.8%

A central interest in this study was the patterns of response across students' choices of audience. Overall, study participants (Table 4) preferred to write to the instructor (n=48; 46.2%) rather than a novice (n=38, 36.5%) or an adjacent expert (n=18, 17.3%). Across all audience options, the most frequent qualitative codes assigned to their responses about why participants chose the option they did (i.e., Rationale for Choice) were *ease* (49.0% of participants, *ns*=51), *familiarity* (32.7%, *ns*=34), and *relate* (21.2%, *ns*=22).[8] Table 4 shows how these codes differed by audience type chosen.

Table 4: Code Frequencies for Rationale for Choice Based on Audience Option Chosen

Audience written to	Most frequent codes	Code frequency (count)	Code frequency (% of participants in each group)
Teacher	EASE	28	58.3%
ns = 48 (46.2% of sample)	FAM	19	39.6%
102 codes applied	LEARN	11	22.9%
Novice	EASE	16	42.1%
ns = 38 (36.5%)	FAM, RELATE	13	34.2%
91 codes applied	IMPACT	12	31.6%
Adjacent expert	EASE	7	38.9%
ns = 18 (17.3%)	HYPOTH, IMPACT, RELATE	4	22.2%
43 codes applied	PREFER	3	16.7%

Across all audience options, perception of the relative ease of the task was the top driver we coded.[9] Thus, students often chose the audience that felt easiest to connect with, regardless whether they chose to write to the teacher, a novice, or an adjacent expert. For example, one student who wrote to a novice explained, "I chose the option that I did because I found it easier to use the basic terms and definitions to help further explain the point I was trying to make." Another student, who wrote to instructor-as-inspector, noted, "I choose the first option because I find this the easiest. I think it is easier to write an essay than to try and write like how people talk in a verbal conversation or casually through emails."

After *ease*, students who chose to write for instructor-as-inspector or novices indicated that a sense of *familiarity* with the topic, task, or audience was a major driver. In contrast, students who wrote for adjacent experts were less likely to mention issues of familiarity in their responses; *familiarity* was not a top-five code for this sub-set of writers. Together, these co-occurring codes suggest that many students, when given options for audience, preferred writing tasks that seemed relatively easy and familiar.

These results suggest that students valued having a choice of audience in part because it allowed them to have some control over their level of comfort with the task. For example, one student who chose to write to a novice shared, "I found the writing to a family member may be easier for me and

I liked that idea more and was more comfortable writing towards a family member." Thus, in the context of these writing assignments, it seems that students valued having a choice of audience partially as a way to mitigate discomfort or difficulty of having to write for less familiar audiences.

In contrast to *ease* and *familiarity* (the most common codes for participants' choice of audience), *grade* was mentioned only five times across both sets of open-ended responses. Students typically did not frame their sense of *ease* directly in terms of expected or desired grades. We see this as a positive finding, suggesting that students were not foregrounding classroom evaluation in their decision-making. Yet, also, the few direct mentions of grading perhaps also reflect the normalization or even invisibility of the pedagogic/academic setting. One student noted, "I am used to an academic style oriented towards an instructor in the field. The choice felt easy and most suitable for the topic." Another student wrote, "This is the type of audience I've learned to write to my whole life. It made it easier for me to write about because of that." These kinds of responses reinforce our view that at least some students see the instructor as a type of non-audience, one who escapes the notice of the writers (Spinuzzi, 1996; Artemeva, 2009). Thus, though grade was not often an expressed aspect, our analysis provides some indication that these students, like those in Herrington's (1985) study of upper-level students, may not have been especially conscious of their identity as students writing for the instructor.

Writing to Instructor: A Writing-to-Learn Activity?

Among students who chose to write for instructor-as-inspector, the code *learn* was applied relatively frequently (22.9% of responses; see Table 4) in their explanations of their choice of audience. Indeed, students who chose to write for instructor-as-inspector were the only group for which *learn* was a top-five code. This trend was unexpected, since scholars have suggested that writing-to-learn may be better achieved through writing tasks oriented towards audiences beyond the extremely narrow instructor-as-examiner context. We are buoyed by the fact that, even in our relatively constricted instructor-as-inspector contexts, many students clearly saw instructors as engaged disciplinary readers (Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006) rather than only as evaluators of correctness. Further, in some responses there was a strong perception that writing to the invisible or for-granted audience of instructor allowed students to focus on learning content distinct from the burden of rhetorically shaping that material for a less-familiar audience. For example, one student commented, "I think I understand it more when I write it like a short essay [to the instructor]," while another explained, "I wanted to make myself summarize the chapter so that I would review the chapter in its entirety again. I felt this option would help me gather a better understanding of the details I missed the first time reading it."

This trend suggests that, for at least a subset of these students, writing to the instructor was perceived as a writing-to-learn activity. Although Melzer (2014) represents informative writing in examination settings as activity not typically oriented toward writing-to-learn, our analysis indicates that a set of students did see informative writing to an implied instructor as a specific type of opportunity for making meaning through writing; for example, one student noted, "I felt that writing a summary would strengthen my own understanding of the content in the chapter. …While writing a more 'creative' response is fun, I didn't feel that it would be most helpful to me."

Quotes like this suggest that students can perceive themselves as knowledge-makers separately from rhetorical, enacted knowledge-building that comes through communication with explicit others. The student responses here demonstrate that students did see epistemic, knowledge-making functions for writing even in the purportedly arhetorical context of writing to the instructor. This finding extends and complicates Carter, Ferzli, and Wiebe's (2007) previous arguments for a symbiotic view of the relationship of writing to learn and writing to communicate.

Students' Value of Choice of Audiences

While the sections above have focused on student response to the first open-ended question (Rationale for Choice), the analysis now turns to responses to the second question: "In at least 3 sentences, explain why you think it is (or is not) valuable to be asked to write for different kinds of audiences" (Value of Diverse Audiences). As reported above, the vast majority (97%; n=101) of students responded that they did value writing to diverse audiences. And, among all participants (see Table 3), the most frequent qualitative codes in response to the question about why students thought it was valuable to write for different audiences were *diverse* (38.5% of participants, n = 104), *relate* and *flex* (24.0% each), and *gen-com-skills* (22.1%). In other words, students thought that being asked to write for diverse types of audiences was valuable because they recognized the need to interact with diverse audiences, because it allowed them to practice relating specific content for specific audiences, because it made them to become more *flexible* as writers, and because they believed it developed their general skills as communicators. Table 5 further illustrates these trends, broken down by audience choice.

Table 5: Code Frequencies for Value of Diverse Audiences Based on Option Chosen

Audience written to	Most frequent codes	Code frequency (count)	Code frequency (% of participants in each group)
Teacher	DIVERSE	16	33.3%
ns = 48 (46.2% of sample)	FLEX/RELATE	12	25.0%
115 codes applied	CHOICE	10	20.8%
Novice	DIVERSE	14	36.8%
ns = 38 (36.5%)	GEN-COM	11	28.9%
86 codes applied	RELATE/RELEV-FUT	9	23.7%
Adjacent expert	DIVERSE	10	55.6%
ns = 18 (17.3%)	FLEX/RELEV-FUT	5	27.8%
41 codes applied	GEN-COM/RELATE	4	22.2%

The codes are distinctly different from the students' explanations about why they chose the audience they did (Rationale for Choice); specifically, students' explanations about their value of writing for multiple audiences (Value of Different Audiences) were rarely coded with *familiarity* or *ease*. Perhaps this fact seems obvious: interacting with varying audiences outside of classroom settings often requires writers to work beyond the level of their familiarity or sense of task ease. Yet, this finding reveals an interesting pattern in students' approach to the writing assignment: it seems that students overwhelmingly saw the value of writing for different audiences, but they also valued their ability to control their sense of the unknown when writing for unfamiliar audiences.

To more closely analyze students' engagement level (Table 6), participants were collapsed into two groups: less engaged (those who reported being moderately engaged or not very engaged) and more engaged (those who reported being very engaged or mostly engaged). As noted earlier, across the entire sample 26 (25.0%) of the participants were in the less engaged group and 78 (75.0%) of the participants were in the more engaged group.

Table 6: Code Frequencies for Rationale for Choice Based on Engagement

Engagement level	Most frequent codes	Code frequency (count)	Code frequency (% of participants in each group)
More engaged *ns* = 78 (75%) 180 codes applied	EASE	31	39.7%
	FAM/RELATE	19	24.4%
	IMPACT	14	17.9%
Less engaged *ns* = 26 (25%) 56 codes applied	EASE	20	76.9%
	FAM	15	57.7%
	IMPACT/LEARN	4	15.4%

In both groups, *ease, familiarity*, and *impact* were among the most frequent codes. Notably, though, students who reported being more engaged were assigned a wider range of qualitative codes in their responses, while students who reported being less engaged had fewer codes as well as a narrower range of codes assigned to their responses. Additionally, among those who were less engaged, a much higher percentage of students (57.7%) referenced the *ease* of the writing task as a factor in their choice of audience (versus only 24.4% of more engaged students). This may indicate that students who did not find the writing task to be difficult may have not found it to be engaging—or, alternately, that those who did not find the task engaging may have chosen the audience based on perceptions about which seemed easiest to write for.

Regarding their beliefs about the relative value of writing for diverse audiences, we note one other difference between students who were less engaged and those who were more engaged: the codes *flex* (the most common code for less engaged students, occurring in 30.8% of responses) and *diverse* (the most common code for more engaged students, occurring in 43.6% of responses) are similar but are distinguished by the level of attention to specific audiences (Table 7).

Responses marked as *flex* indicated the perception of a general benefit to the writer of being able to write for multiple audiences, while responses marked as *diverse* reflect a greater focus on the need to adapt to specific audiences. In other words, we view flexibility as a primarily writer-centered value, while we characterize diversity as a more audience-centered value. This distinction suggests that more-engaged students may be more attuned to/invested in the needs of various audiences than are less-engaged students.

Table 7: Code Frequencies for Value of Diverse Audiences Based on Engagement

Engagement level	Most frequent codes	Code frequency (count)	Code frequency (% of participants in each group)
More engaged *ns* = 78 (75%) 181 codes applied	DIVERSE	34	43.6%
	RELATE	19	24.4%
	FLEX/GEN-COM	17	21.8%
Less engaged *ns* = 26 (25%) 61 codes applied	FLEX	8	30.8%
	PERSP	7	26.9%
	DIVERSE/GEN-COM/ RELATE/RELEV-FUT	6	23.1%

As a final point of analysis, direct terms for engagement (*e.g.,* "engage," "engaging," "engaged") occurred only four times in the entire set of responses. Yet, the variety of codes in our codebook helps illuminate the multiple ways students engaged with the writing task. For our participants, engagement was sometimes oriented towards expressivist and writing-to-learn characteristics (demonstrated in codes like *learn, push,* and *flex*); audience-oriented values (demonstrated in codes like *diverse* and *relate*); content-oriented goals (e.g., *relate*, *perspective*); current or future benefits (e.g., *relevant-now, relevant-future, real, impact*), and other important motives (e.g., *joy, create*). Thus, students' value of writing for audiences was oriented to varying degrees toward learner, audience, and content, but not in ways that are made fully clear in the current analysis. Our decision not to collapse our 21 codes into a smaller set of categories was motivated in part by a goal of opening a problem space for further exploration. (For example, electing not to collapse the *grade* code into a larger category allowed us to see and question its relative rarity across the student responses).

Implications for the Field

Several findings contribute to broader conversations in WAC/WID (and in writing studies more broadly):

- A compelling majority of students (97%) valued having a choice of audience to write for.
- More students (though not a majority) chose to write for instructor-as-inspector rather than for a novice or adjacent expert audience. Additionally, responses of those students who chose to write for the instructor-as-inspector were more likely to be coded as *learn.* We think this means that at least some of the students felt that writing to an invisible or for-granted audience of instructor allowed them to focus on learning content distinct from the burden of rhetorically shaping that material for less familiar but more concrete audiences.
- A majority (75%) rated the assignment as quite easy or fairly easy, and students seemed to value having a choice of audience partially as a way to mitigate discomfort or difficulty of writing for less familiar audiences. However, we do not read students' preference for ease as a simple quest for the path of least resistance. As Gee (2005) has suggested, being in a state of "pleasing frustration" (p. 10) can be conducive to learning. The fact that most

students reported being moderately to very engaged in the writing task suggests that their ability to moderate the task complexity (through the choice of audience) may have helped them work at the edge of their realm of competence. This finding, too, complements Eodice, Geller, and Lerner's (2016) finding that students found writing meaningful when it provided both constraint and flexibility.

- Though most students chose which audience to write for based in part on their perceptions of relative ease and familiarity of the writing for that audience, 97% of them simultaneously saw a value in being asked to write for differing types of audiences, often because they saw other audiences as stretching their rhetorical skills. For at least some students, then, their reasoning seemed to run in this way: "I value the opportunity to write beyond the familiar, but I ultimately make choices that feel comfortable." The fact that a plurality of students chose to write to the instructor as audience seems in some ways a reflection of this tension—the instructor was perhaps seen as a familiar, often easier, and perhaps less-risky audience to write for (even though students who wrote for this audience were less likely to explain that choice in terms of real-life impact, future relevance, or new perspectives on the audience or on course content).
- Only a small minority of students described themselves as not very engaged; qualitatively, our coding of open-ended responses indicated that the more engaged students were more invested in imagining and responding to the needs of various audiences than were the less engaged students.

These trends complicate claims (e.g. Melzer, 2014; Bean, 2011; Kiefer et al., 2000-2021 about the value of hypothetical audiences for promoting more disciplinary approaches for writing-to-communicate. At the most basic level, the study suggests that realness of the audience may be an individual student determination. Though not entirely performative in the embodied way that Fishman et. al (2005) described, these students still suggest that opportunities to creatively construct and perform for imagined audiences was seen as meaningful, engaging work. And, too, at least some instructor-as-inspector writing may be understood as expressivist writing, through which students focus on the inward struggle to clarify meaning for their own learning.

Additionally, our research extends Eodice, Geller, and Lerner's (2016) claims about meaningful writing and transfer. By attending to "learning for transfer" (rather than "teaching for transfer"), Eodice, Geller, and Learner emphasize student agency as an important component of writing transfer. In their study of writing activities that students found meaningful, these scholars identified four conditions that can enhance students' ability to learn for transfer: a sense of novelty/newness, the ability to call on prior knowledge, the ability to connect writing to their future work/identity, and a sense of personal connection. Based on student perspectives expressed in our study, we suspect that one advantage of choice in writing assignments is that it encourages students to learn for transfer by allowing them to hold steady some elements of the writing task. That is, a choice of rhetorical context (even if those contexts are hypothetical) can allow students to direct their writing towards on the conditions that feel most salient to them. This is suggested, as previously noted, by the student who wrote, "I felt that writing a summary would strengthen my own understanding of the content in the chapter. …While writing a more 'creative' response is fun, I didn't feel that it would be most helpful to me." This student's desire to deepen their understanding of new content seems to be the key driver of engagement, leading them to de-emphasize other conditions that might also produce learning for transfer. Having a choice of audiences thus supports Eodice, Geller, and Lerner's call for assignments that create a more "generative, reciprocal arrangement" (p. 97) that provide students an agentive, authorial role in their learning.

Within our local contexts, this study will bring small changes to our own approaches to teaching and assigning of writing:

1. One co-author who works with pre- and in-service teachers is using this research to engage those learners in discussions focused on issues similar to the survey questions in this study. Even when pre- and in-service teachers may not find multiple audience options appropriate for their own current or future course settings, the co-author believes that metacognitive discussions can help these teachers articulate and challenge their beliefs about which applications and contexts of knowledge they value most.
2. Another co-author finds students' broad appreciation for choice compelling; based on this finding, she has incorporated aspects of student choice (choice in topic, choice in product created, choice in audience, etc.) into most projects and written assignments.
3. A co-author who teaches educational research plans to continue using the writing assignment for different audiences in future courses to help with applied learning and practice for connecting with different stakeholders in community research. Similarly, a co-author who teaches soil science plans to incorporate more writing activities for various audiences in future courses. She finds this writing approach particularly effective in applied soil courses because it helps students to think beyond the science, toward how they can articulate their own knowledge and skills to different audiences, which she sees as especially useful for job interviews and other career-related endeavors ahead.
4. A co-author who facilitates the institution's communication across the curriculum program intends to integrate these findings into faculty development programming, specifically in relationship to anti-racist writing pedagogies and assessment. If, as Inoue (2015) has suggested, literacy is an "inner dike" of White supremacy (p. 11), then traditional and disciplinary genres need to be understood as psychological and material tools of ongoing linguistic injustice. Even if faculty in the disciplines may not fully understand the supremacist underpinnings of the genres they currently ask students to perform in their classrooms, it seems that encouraging them to allow students a choice of assignment task can help open up space for other genres (and their rhetorically embedded impacts) to emerge. This research offers evidence that may help convince faculty to take an initial step towards imagining and assigning genres beyond the obvious and familiar. From this initial step should come further opportunities to talk about alternate (and perhaps less racist) ways for faculty to accomplish the doing and knowing that matters most to their disciplines (Carter, 2007).

In closing: the title of this article draws attention to the fact that, even at the college level, some students see their teachers as an audience they have been trained to write for their whole lives. Yet, our study participants' overwhelming value for having multiple options—as well as the compelling rationales they provided for that value—suggests that instructors can increase student engagement by allowing them to choose from a range of audiences to whom they want to communicate their developing knowledge.

Appendix A: Sample Choice Assignment Prompts

From Educational Research:

1. Consider research ethics in your proposed study and provide a general overview of how a researcher might follow guidelines for ethical research within the action research process. Specifically note ethical considerations you would address in different steps of the action research model and principles (e.g. informed consent, recruitment, data collection, implementing findings). Provide evidence from your reading and discuss ethical requirements your methodological design. [Instructor as inspector]
2. Imagine that a participant in your study is hesitant to complete your informed consent and has questions about what their experience might be as they complete the aspect of your research study. Help explain to this participant why they were recruited for the study, what they might expect as a participant, and how their participation might offer benefits to others. [Novice]
3. Imagine the IRB has expressed some concerns about your research and is hesitant to provide approval for you to begin. They expressed concerns about protection for your participants in your study and the impact on the overall environment for your work. Create a response to the IRB explaining your considerations for participant support and protection regarding safety and confidentiality/anonymity. Provide a rationale about how your study would positively impact the environment of your research setting and others considerations to demonstrate your research is sound and grounded in appropriate research ethics. [Adjacent expert]

From Life Sciences (Partial Excerpt):

STEP 3 – Group Discussion/Assignment

In your table groups, discuss the obesity/sedentary life-style crisis and brainstorm as many methods for reducing or solving this crisis. Remember that new scientific research shows that obesity is NOT due to laziness, lack of motivation, or other individual personality traits. With this in mind, answer the question: What should be done to address the obesity/sedentary life-style crisis?

You can use any resources including the handouts at your table, internet sources, etc. to gather the necessary information to make an informed decision. Make sure your argument includes:

- **State the claim/plan** – What actions should be taken to address the obesity/sedentary life-style crisis?
- **Include evidence** (data, quotes, interpretations, etc.) for your claim.
- **Provide justification** for the claim – explain why the evidence is relevant and why it provides adequate support for the claim. How will your plan work to reduce the problem?
- Write up your claim, evidence, and justification on the white board at your table. Have an instructor look over your response before continuing to STEP 4.

STEP 4 – Individual Assignment/Homework

Individually, you will write a **1-2-page paper** (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, 1-inch margins) for most of the points for the Unit 4 Project. You will need to **select one of the three following audiences** for your paper.

1. write an essay on the topic to your instructor [Instructor as inspector];
2. write a letter to a high school student without a strong understanding of the obesity/sedentary life-style crisis that needs to know the information to make better life-style choices [Novice]; OR
3. write a report to a nurse or physician that knows a lot about human health but may not have the latest information on the obesity/sedentary life-style crisis and issues of fat shaming (physicians are one of the main groups to use fat shaming). [Adjacent expert]

From Art Education:

An aesthetic response can be defined as a heightened reaction or emotional response to objects or images. (*Art for Life,* Anderson and Milbrandt). These objects or images might be characterized as beautiful, special, disturbing, functional or have any number of other characteristics.

For this assignment, please choose a collection of objects or images that you can look at and experience firsthand. There are a number of places on campus or [the community] where original artworks can be found. Consider the nature of your aesthetic response to this particular collection of objects or images. *Keep in mind that there are no "right" answers in aesthetics – your personal experiences with art and ideas about aesthetics will shape your unique perspective on the question, "What is Art?"*

In your post, please respond to one of the following options in a post of no more than 500 words.

1. A short essay, in which you explain your reasoning to the question: "Is it art?" Given your aesthetic response to the objects you chose to focus on, explain whether you think these objects are art (or not), and why. Support your explanation with theories of aesthetics that are discussed in our readings. Keep in mind that aesthetic inquiry involves questions about the purpose of art, the meaning, the value and the concepts. [Instructor as inspector]
2. An imagined conversation via email with a future high school teacher colleague in a non-art discipline (such as a history or business teacher), who is skeptical about the value of aesthetics as a topic of study. Imagine that the two of you visited the same exhibition together (this would be of the specific images/objects you chose for this assignment). Your teacher colleague has expressed doubt about whether the art that you saw together was truly "art." Explain to him/her your aesthetic response to the artwork and why you think it is art, using theories from your readings and citing specific examples of the art you viewed. [Adjacent expert]
3. A response to an imagined future student who is interested in art but who is still struggling to understand what is exciting/meaningful about art as an aesthetic experience. Imagine that the student (Lillian) stuck around after a visit to the art museum to talk with you about why you found the art you viewed together to be so meaningful. How might you explain to her your own aesthetic response to the set of objects as a way to explain to her what an aesthetic experience is about?

What guidance could you give about how aesthetic principles (taken from the readings for our class) might help her in her search to figure out the purpose and meaning of art? [Novice]

No matter which option you choose, please end with a brief summary of your theory about how to define art.

Appendix B: Cumulative Link Model Output Tables

The following categorical independent variables were included in both full models: Major (majors, non-majors, or mixed course), Academic Level (Lower Level [freshman/sophomore-level course], Upper Level [junior/senior-level course], Upper Level+Graduate, and Graduate only), Division (Social Science, Humanities, or STEM), and Option (student's choice of writing prompt). The Likert-item question not being tested (either Level of Difficulty or Level of Engagement) was also added to the full model. We did not include interaction terms in our models because the resulting models containing interaction effects failed to converge and therefore were invalid.

Table B.1. ANOVA outputs for comparisons of different cumulative link models for the dependent variable: Level of Engagement. Significant p-values indicate that the element removed from the model is important (significant) to the full model. Thus, for Level of Engagement, the Level of Ease (the student's perceived level of difficulty), Major, and Division (Humanities, STEM, or Social Sciences) were all significant to the student's perceived Level of Engagement on the written assignment.

Models for Level of Engagement	Removed Element	X^2 value	p-value
Full vs Level of Engagement ~ Major + Academic Level + Division + Option.	Level of Ease	15.44	**0.002**
Full vs Level of Engagement ~ Level of Ease + Academic Level + Division + Option.	Major	6.71	**0.035**
Full vs. Level of Engagement ~ Level of Ease + Major + Division + Option.	Academic Level	4.09	0.252
Full vs. Level of Engagement ~ Level of Ease + Major + Academic Level + Option.	Division	10.47	**0.005**
Full vs. Level of Engagement ~ Level of Ease + Major + Academic Level + Division.	Option	4.29	0.117

Full model = Level of Engagement ~ Level of Ease + Major + Academic Level + Division + Option.

Table B.2. ANOVA outputs for comparisons of different cumulative link models for the dependent variable: Level of Ease. Significant p-values indicate that the element removed from the model is important to the model. Thus, only the Level of Engagement with the written assignment was significant for the student's perceived level of difficulty (Level of Ease) with the writing task.

Models for Level of Ease	Removed Element	X^2 value	p-value
Full vs Level of Ease ~ Major + Academic Level + Division + Option.	Level of Engagement	13.45	**0.004**

Full vs Level of Ease ~ Level of Engagement + Academic Level + Division + Option.	Major	2.59	0.275
Full vs. Level of Ease ~ Level of Engagement + Major + Division + Option.	Academic Level	3.375	0.185
Full vs. Level of Ease ~ Level of Engagement + Major + Academic Level + Option.	Division	3.001	0.390
Full vs. Level of Ease ~ Level of Engagement + Major + Academic Level + Division.	Option	1.510	0.470

Full model = Level of Ease ~ Level of Engagement + Major + Academic Level + Division + Option.

Appendix C: Full Codebook

CODEBOOK

- Apply no more than 3 codes to any single response, and focus on those labels which seem MOST relevant to the response
- Don't stretch to apply a code; apply codes that are suggested by the response, not vice versa
- During paired coding, resolve mismatched codes through discussion.

LABEL	CODE	DEFINITION
EASE	Considering ease/difficulty	A reference to the relative ease or difficulty of options
FAM	Choosing familiarity	A reference to audiences/tasks/content that feel known/safe/comfortable
UNFAM	Feeling unfamiliar	A reference to audiences/tasks/content that are outside of one's comfort zone
JOY	Finding enjoyment/fun	A reference to joy, passion, or fun
CREATE	Valuing creativity	A reference to opportunity to be creative
RELEV-FUT	Seeing future relevance	A reference to student seeing future or career relevance for the task or audience
RELEV-NOW	Seeing immediate relevance	A reference to the student seeing immediate application/value for the task or audience
HYPOTH	Dealing with hypotheticals	A reference to a sense of the task as hypothetical or related to imagined worlds/audiences/activities
REAL	Seeing the task as real	A direct reference to the task/audience as "real"
IMPACT	Recognizing an impact of their writing on an audience	A reference to the ability to impact or persuade the audience – to make a change in the audience's understanding/view. Driven by consideration for the audience
PREFER	Topic/content as factor	A reference to the writer's own interest/passion for one prompt's content/topic as a factor for their selecting it

PUSH	Pushing oneself	A reference to wanting to challenge oneself holistically (not specifically in relationship to writing task or to content)
LEARN	Considering oneself as learner	A reference to a goal of teaching oneself the course content through the writing task (including remembering/comprehending course material)
GEN-COM SKILLS	Developing "skills"/style/voice	A reference to building writing skills, **NOT** directed towards a specific audience or audience impact. (A generic reference, undifferentiated/unfocused on type of skill)
PERSP	Considering new perspectives (on the topic)	A reference to a general value for thinking about the topic differently
FLEX	Becoming more flexible (generally)	A reference to multiple audiences as making the writer more adaptable/flexible. Focused on the **writer** without direct reference to any specific audience
DIVERSE	Responding to diverse audiences	A reference to a recognition that the writer does or will need to interact with/adapt to various audiences. **Focused on the recipients/audiences/readers.**
SELECT	Selecting appropriate content (generally)	A reference to an effort to choose among or compress ideas: **Selecting *what* to say** (focused on content, *without* a direct reference to any specific audience)
RELATE	Making writing accessible/relatable for specific audience	A reference to how ideas can best be framed for the audience(s): **Considering *how to say it*** (referring to features within the text)
GRADE	Achieving desired grade	A reference to grading as a motive for selecting one option over others
CHOICE	Appreciating option to select among audiences	A reference to a value for being able to choose an audience (for the writer and/or others in the course)

Appendix D: Another Look at *Ease*

To further analyze perceptions of ease, we explored relationships related to students' perceived ease of the task as rated on the four-point scale question. For this analysis, participants were collapsed into two groups: easy (those who found the assignment quite easy or fairly easy) and hard (those who found the assignment fairly hard or quite hard). As noted previously, across the entire sample, 92 (88.5%) of the participants were in the easy group and 12 (11.5%) of the participants were in the hard group.

For both groups, the most frequently occurring code for Rationale for Choice was *ease*, which was assigned to 48.9% of the participants who perceived the writing task easy and 50.0% of the participants who perceived the task as hard. Though 88.5% of the students rated their writing task as "quite easy" or "fairly easy," only about half of students of students in either group rationalized their choice of one audience over another in terms that we coded as *ease*. As supported by the cumulative link model analysis, this finding confirms that the perceived easiness of the task was important but was not the key or only driver students identified to explain their choice of audience.

Among students who reported finding the writing task easy, we assigned 213 codes to their responses explaining their Value for Diverse Audiences, and we assigned 29 codes to responses from those who found the task to be hard (See Appendix C for a table of most common codes applied). In short, no clear trends stand out in these response patterns. Both for students who found writing to be easy and those who found it to be difficult, participants most commonly referenced the perceived need to interact with various types of audiences in the real world (*diverse*). For those who found the writing task to be easy, students saw the task as making them more flexible (*flexible*) as writers in considering how to frame ideas for different audiences. Among the small group who found the writing task to be hard, students identified building general communication skills (*gen-com-skills*) in the context of real-world application (*real*) as key values.

Table 8: Code frequencies for Rationale for Choice based on Ease of Task

Ease of writing to audience	Most frequent codes	Code frequency (count)	Code frequency (% of participants in each group)
Easy *ns* = 92 (88.5% of sample) 102 codes applied	EASE	45	48.9%
	FAM	31	33.7%
	RELATE	21	22.8%
Hard *ns* = 12 (11.5% of sample) 27 codes applied	EASE	6	50.0%
	FAM/PREFER	3	25.0%
	CHOICE/GEN-COM/LEARN/REAL	2	16.7%

Table 9: Code frequencies for Value for Diverse Audiences based on Ease of Task

Ease of writing to audience	Most frequent codes	Code frequency (count)	Code frequency (% of participants in each group)
Easy *ns* = 92 88.5% of sample	DIVERSE	36	39.1%
	FLEX	24	26.1%
	RELATE	22	23.9%
Hard *ns* = 12 11.5% of sample	DIVERSE	4	33.3%
	GEN-COM/REAL/ RELATE/PERSP/	3	25.0%
	IMPACT/LEARN/ RELEV-FUT	2	16.7%

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Notes

1 As described more fully in the research design, we borrow these terms from Melzer's (2014) adaptation of Britton's (1975) audience types.

2 Britton's taxonomy included instructor, peers, self, and wider audience; these categories are also similar to Bean's (2011) categories of naive audience, outside professional audience, and instructor as audience).

3 The range of courses reflects the breadth of participants in the faculty learning community that ultimately led to this project. The faculty learning community theme, "Using Writing and Communication Activities to Promote Better Learning," drew faculty from beyond traditional focuses of WAC outreach, including graduate and ESL courses.

4 Categorization of each course's Subject/Discipline was based on the instructors' knowledge of course content. Art Education, ESL Composition, Disability Studies, and Composition Studies were classified as Humanities courses; Communication and Education Research were classified as Social Science; and Life Sciences and Soil Judging courses were considered STEM courses.

5 Y indicates a course in which the majority of students were enrolled in order to meet a specific program requirement; N indicates a course that served as an elective for most students in the course.

6 We also collected student responses to the audience choice assignment and intend to conduct analysis of that work in a future phase of research.

7 Boldface indicates the five most common codes for each response.

8 At this point, we want to reinforce the difference between Level of Ease as a scale question and ease as a qualitative code. Our code ease was applied whenever students directly acknowledged a sense of the task's perceived effort (easy/difficult) as a motivating factor. Though 88.5% of the students rated their writing task as "quite easy" or "fairly easy," only about half of students of students rationalized their choice of one audience over another in terms that we coded as ease. Appendix D provides more information about these relationships.

9 "Ease" was often expressed in relative terms, such as one choice feeling "easier" or "less hard" than others. Thus we did not create a separate HARD code. In cases where a student intentionally chose a "harder" audience, the code PUSH was typically applied to capture the goal of challenging oneself.

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