

Five Strategies Internet Writers Use to “Continue the Conversation”

Written Communication
2015, Vol. 32(4) 396–425
© 2015 SAGE Publications
Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0741088315601006
wcx.sagepub.com



John R. Gallagher¹

Abstract

This article investigates the strategies web-writers develop when their audiences respond to them via textual participation. Focusing on three web-writers who want to “continue the conversation,” this article identifies five major strategies to accomplish this aim: (a) editing after production, (b) quotation, (c) question posing, (d) naming secondary writers, and (e) textual listening. Using the lens of writer-audience tension, I find that due to these web-writers’ perceptions of audience, one that is partially externalized via the website’s template, the term *audience* itself may not be a discrete concept, but a fluid, evolving, and recursive one, in other words, ongoing. These perceptions of audience reflect the unending nature of online texts and are exemplified by these five strategies.

Keywords

textual participation, Internet audience, Internet templates, social media writing, writing on Reddit, blogging, Facebook forum writing

Web-writers regularly receive readers’ textual response in today’s interactive and participatory Internet (IPI) environments. Due to this textual response, web-writers use strategies to adjust to their ongoing perception of

¹University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL, USA

Corresponding Author:

John R. Gallagher, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 608 S. Wright St., Box 22, Urbana, IL 61801, USA.

Email: johng@illinois.edu

audience. By ongoing perception, I mean fluid (composition varies), evolving (the components of the composition change with time), and recursive (perception occurs repeatedly). These strategies, combined with the writer's own statements, provide researchers with some indication of the way web-writers conceptualize or reconceptualize their audiences. In this article, I summarize five strategies taken from in-depth case studies of three IPI writers. These writers have similar stated purposes of civil discourse, though they contend with different types of IPI audiences. Using textual and interview-based evidence, I argue that these strategies highlight the way a web-writer's conception of audience is ongoing due to textual participation in IPI environments.

Textual participation on the Internet arises from a confluence of two capabilities enabled by interactive templates through which users participate: frequent text exchange and text placement. By *frequent text exchange*, I mean users can write back and forth to one another through comment functions or text editors. By *text placement*, I refer to the close proximity in which comments are placed with respect to the initial (or prior) text. These templates shrink both time and space between writer and audience, which extends claims that technological developments have an effect of "time-space compression," or the idea that technology increases the speed of production, distribution, and circulation (Harvey, 1989). Time-space compression is one major delineation between writing in IPI settings and print writing. This confluence may force web-writers to frequently contend with textual participation, an issue that affects the production, distribution, and circulation of written Internet texts.

While researchers have investigated interactive online templates in terms of design (Arola, 2010; Gallagher, 2015), my focus here is only on the fact that these templates provide the opportunity for textual audience participation. With respect to these templates, there is typically what I call an *initial writer*. By initial writer, I mean a writer who initiates, facilitates, or manages participation. These writers may also comment but I use the term to distinguish their level of power and authority from audiences (who might be labeled secondary writers). Here I present an analysis of three initial writers, chosen for their independently stated purpose of "civil discourse." An important part of civil discourse, for these writers, is to "continue the conversation." They implement this aim through one or more of the five strategies I present in this article. In addition to a unifying purpose, these three web-writers constitute a broad cross-section of the types of interaction and participation encountered on the Internet. These types of interaction and participation arise from different platforms: a WordPress blog, a private Facebook forum, and Reddit.

In order to achieve civil discourse, initial writers in IPI environments must balance the need to respond to textual participation with the need to make their own writing choices. In consideration of this balance, these writers develop strategies particular to their purpose. This article, then, provides some answers to the following questions:

1. What kinds of strategies do these writers use when they know they may receive textual participation in the future?
2. What kinds of strategies do these writers use when they have received textual participation?

This balance, or the writer-audience tension, is not new, as I summarize next in a selected review of scholarship on the writer-audience relationship. However, textual participation makes this tension explicit while concretely informing the initial writer in a way that is not intended for editing or revision. To provide evidence for this assertion, I describe the methodological framework for data collection and analysis that leads to the five strategies synthesized from my three case studies. I conclude with two concepts for further investigation.

Textual Participation and Writer-Audience Tensions

In IPI environments, textual participation foregrounds the explicit written claims announced audiences make on an initial writer. However, audiences always make claims on writers and speakers that require some interaction (e.g., Goffman, 1959, 1981). These claims result in a writer-audience tension that can be defined as the relationship between the choices a writer makes to persuade an audience versus the choices a writer makes in response to an audience. This tension is found throughout theories of audience and its associated terms. Using an audience framework, for example, Ede and Lunsford's (1984) concepts of "address" and "invoke" identify a tension between writers' perceived reality of readers and the rhetorical role writers aim for readers to adopt. Bartholomae (1985), Herrington (1985), Bizzell (1986), Gee (1990), Porter (1992), and Lunsford and Ede (1996) draw on the concept of discourse community to describe the historical pressures, institutional authorities, and social expectations/roles writers contend with when writing in (or outside) a particular community. Theories of publics (Eberly, 2000; Edbauer, 2005; Warner, 2005) and composite audiences (Duncan, 2011; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) rearticulate this tension as navigating a symphony and concatenation of multiple audiences that often place competing expectations on writers. Actor-network theory and

activity theory have described writer-audience tensions by asserting the influence of nonhuman actors as possible audiences, especially in theories of invention through the interplay of ambience and human beings (Rickert, 2013). Textual participation, which cuts across all of these theories, makes writer-audience tensions concrete for the writer.

In other words, this tension is no longer solely imagined, which is one way researchers have described the writer-audience tension in IPI environments (Brake, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2011). Picking up on the term *imagined audiences*, Eden Litt (2012) provides a framework for understanding the way users of mediated communication may imagine their audiences through macro-level factors (e.g., social norms, active audiences, features of sites/services) and micro-level factors (e.g., social media motivation, Internet skill). Litt concludes with a call, which this study answers, for conducting more studies between a user's actual audience and the user's imagined audience because they "may provide insight into social training and/or technological solutions to help everyday people navigate through mediated publics" (p. 342).

This article details five strategies initial writers have developed in negotiating the tension between an imagined audience and an audience's textual participation. The strategies I present are designed to encourage a continuing conversation in a way that is impossible in print text, which lacks the time-space compression discussed earlier. I frame the strategies as writing, despite their resonance with speaking, because texts in IPI environments persist; that is, unlike online chat rooms wherein texts disappear after a browser is closed, these texts are maintained on servers that keep texts online and accessible. While I draw these strategies from a larger extensive study with the aim of exploring IPI writers' ways of contending with textual participation generally, in this article I focus only on the writing strategies for encouraging further textual participation or "continuing the conversation," a phrase my participants used independently of each other during interviews.

Context

This study is situated in the template-standardized interactions of Internet cultures that emerged in the early and mid-2000s. Rather than program their own websites, users manipulate templated websites run by organizations and businesses to communicate. While business models refer to this as Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005), I use the phrase *interactive and participatory Internet* (IPI) to emphasize users' motivations, purposes, and goals. In doing so, I de-emphasize monetary aspects of IPI environments.

As IPI environments and templates proliferate, textual participation has grown along with them in the form of commenting cultures. A vast body of research exists on commenting and commenters. For a comprehensive review of empirical studies see Malinen (2015), and for a taxonomy of comments see Reagle (2015). This research, in very broad terms, focuses on IPI environments, the commenters, and the functions of online comments. First, researchers have investigated the discussion factors that make an IPI environment interactive (Ziegele, Breiner, & Quiring, 2014) and how the nature of the forum influences the civility of that interaction (Rowe, 2015; Santana, 2014a), touching on issues of race and racism (Loke, 2012) as well as gender and sexism (Moss-Racusin, Molenda, & Cramer, 2015). Second, researchers have studied the parameters that impact a commenter's credibility (Kareklas, Muehling, & Weber, 2015), which is often intertwined with issues of anonymity (Reader, 2012; Santana, 2014b) and motivation (or perceived motivation) given that motivation appears to be social (Springer, Engelmann, & Pfaffinger, 2015). It has been noted that trolling can negatively impact credibility (Phillips, 2015), including the credibility of the text by influencing reader trust (Marchionni, 2015). Finally, online comments themselves can perform a variety of functions including reviewing (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chua & Banerjee, 2015), interpreting and questioning scientific arguments (Len-Rios, Bhandari, & Medvedeva, 2014), recording reader reactions to journalistic information (Ürper & Çevikel, 2014), editing ebooks (Laquintano, 2010), peer reviewing and community building in online classrooms (Molinari, 2004), and encouraging democratic discourse at the local (Canter, 2013) and national levels (Dashti, Al-Kandari, & Al-Abdullah, 2015). These studies demonstrate mechanisms by which a wide variety of comment cultures can evolve and the effects these cultures have on both the commenters and original texts.

This study extends our understanding of online comment culture(s) by examining ways *initial writers* respond to comments. While researchers have assessed how online comments shape attitudes of other commenters (Sung & Lee, 2015), to my knowledge no researchers have focused on how initial writers react to comments *after* the production of online comments. This study provides a look at the impact comment culture has on the production of IPI texts.

Method

In extending Ede and Lunsford's (2009) inquiries about writer-audience relations, I asked two questions in a larger IRB-approved study of IPI writers: (a) How do initial writers compose and change their web texts based on the roles

that they see themselves inhabiting, as well as the roles they see their audience inhabiting? (b) How do initial writers change their texts based on the feedback they receive from their audience? I limit my inquiries within this article to *alphabetic* text in order to focus on writing strategies. This avoids debate about what is considered writing in IPI contexts (Wolff, 2013). In the rest of this section, I outline the study's principles of selection, data collection, and data analysis from the larger study (Gallagher, 2014).

Principles of Selection for Case Studies

Due to the messy contexts of online research (Rickly, 2007), I utilize a case study to systematically produce boundaries while also representing the "multiple-realities" of the participants (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 18; Stake, 1995, p. 43; Yin, 2009, p. 18). Drawing on case study frameworks (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009), I constructed four principles of selection to define each case. These principles of selection, detailed below, enabled me to navigate the spatial, temporal, and relational boundaries of my chosen IPI phenomena (Kendall, 2009). The four principles are as follows.

1. Single Initial Writer: I investigated single initial writers because texts that have multiple initial writers raise issues of collaboration, which are beyond the scope of the study.
2. Level of Reader Access: Level of reader access determines the possible readers for a web text. At one end is a completely open, publicly accessible text, such as a nonmonetized news website or blog. At the other is a completely closed text, which exists solely for a single reader or set of known readers. Figure 1 illustrates this concept of reader access as a continuum between these extremes.

"Level of reader access" emphasizes my focus on the participating audience. Since sites with closed reader access would severely limit the interaction and participation between initial writer and audience, I restrict my study to limited and publicly accessible. "Limited" here implies that initial writers can control who reads the initial texts. "Publicly accessible" implies that anyone who has Internet access can read and comment.

3. Levels of Interaction: I use James E. Porter's (2009) scale of interactivity as a principle of selection. Porter highlights four levels of interaction: (a) access-accessibility, (b) usability, (c) critical engagement, and (d) coproduction. The first two levels of interaction are not useful for my study because they do not enable textual responses. Critical

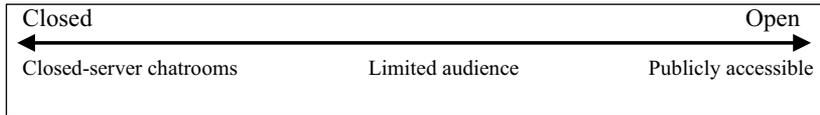


Figure 1. Level of reader access.

engagement and coproduction, which are useful for this study, allow initial writers and secondary writers (e.g., commenters) to respond to one another in dynamic ways. Critical engagement includes the expansion of the web text or even a change in the meaning of the original text due to the position of additional interaction and participation. Most blogs and social news websites allow for this type of interactivity and participation. Coproduction occurs when audience members can adjust the layout and design of a web text, thereby requiring users to act together to produce a text. Limited coproduced web texts often do not delineate between an initial writer and commenters or collapse the distinction between them. For example, wikis are limited coproduced texts because there are many initial writers; I eliminate limited coproduced texts from this study based on my first criterion of selection, restriction to a single writer. On the other hand, publicly accessible coproduced sites such as Reddit, where web texts are organized by audience comment type, approval, or interest while only a single initial writer is responsible for initiating a “thread” or text, are within the scope of this study.

4. Access to Initial Writer: The most pragmatic principle of selection is access to the initial writer. I found participants through a convenience sample method in which I contacted a multitude of online writers to determine who considered their audience’s textual response. All participants agreed to be interviewed three times and signed an IRB-approved consent form; I offered each participant the opportunity to use their real name, to choose a pseudonym, or for me to choose a pseudonym for them.

Writers Selected

The above principles of selection result in four categories of initial writer sites (Table 1). This representation demonstrates that the case studies selected span the range of possibilities for web-writing that fall within the scope of this work. As mentioned in the third criterion, limited coproduced text lies outside the scope of the study.

Table 1. Initial Writers Studied in This Article Within Their Respective Categories.

	Critical engagement	Coproduced
Limited	Facebook (Tracy Monroe)	n/a
Open	WordPress (Kelly Salasin)	Reddit (StickleyMan)

I further focus on writers who share an explicitly (and independently) stated purpose of “civil discourse” or “respectful writing.” They are Kelly Salasin, who chose to use her real name, Tracy Monroe, who chose her pseudonym, and StickleyMan, who chose to use his screen name. All three writers are English speakers over the age of 30 from Western cultures.

Synopsis of Writers

Kelly Salasin. Salasin is well-known blogger in Vermont who has received attention from the *New York Times* and has been blogging since 2009. She constructs her role as a writer by inviting an open readership while simultaneously including herself as an implicit participant; she thanks her readers and makes remarks within the comment function of her blog posts. She often produces texts using the textual participation of her audience.

Tracy Monroe. Tracy Monroe created a Facebook discussion group, *Fresh Heated Politics* (FHP), which she feels obligated to supervise. A professional online journalist, Tracy Monroe founded FHP because her personal Facebook page did not allow her the freedom to express herself rhetorically. Initially disgusted with the lack of “civil dialogue” (Monroe repeated this phrase throughout our three interviews) leading up to the presidential elections in early 2012, Monroe created FHP in August of 2012 when she found it “increasingly difficult to keep [her] mouth shut on politics” (First Interview). As the group’s creator, Monroe acts as the administrator of FHP’s digital space. Individuals typically request membership because they have had conversations with other members.¹

Originally, all members needed to be approved by her but as the group grew larger, Monroe gave three other members the authority to approve new members. Further, with its membership increasing from 80 to 129 members (November 2012-January 2014), FHP membership, while limited, is not stringent; Monroe is aware of this and embraces its growth as “part of the deal” with FHP (Second Interview). Thus, Monroe knows the possible

readers of the group but is never sure who is reading (Facebook offers no gauge to identify specific readers at the time of this publication). Despite this growth, Monroe is clearly the initial writer of the group, most likely because she founded the group. Monroe accounts for 26% of the group's activity (1,468 of 5,622 initial posts and comments are hers) and is the most active initial writer (28% [238 of 847] of all initial posts in FHP are hers).

StickleyMan. StickleyMan is the screen name of the fourth most popular Redditor,² that is, a writer on Reddit. StickleyMan aims to orient members of Reddit, a pseudoanonymous community, toward taking an attitude of learning while looking for a random but constructive experience for himself within his texts (Second Interview). It is important to note two facets of his persona: (a) StickleyMan is an extensive producer of small videos known as GIFs (graphical interchange format) and aims to be humorous in his non-alphabetic-based texts and (b) he has garnered a reputation as an insightful commenter. These two features, I believe, are what give him the online authority to occasionally have “meaningful” and “productive” conversations on Reddit (Discourse-Based Interview). The purpose of his conversations/texts is fundamentally dialogic: other Redditors help him learn and gain insight and he hopes that other Redditors learn from him and each other (First Interview).

Data Collection and Analysis

I began this 11-month study (April 2013-March 2014) with an interest in studying initial writers who consider the textual participation of their audience in some way. After developing my research questions and case study framework, I found a pool of nine possible candidates through a convenience sample. I familiarized myself with each writer's style of writing and the texts they produced. For my first round of data collection, I conducted one-hour semistructured selection interviews over the phone or video chat (for interview protocol, see Appendix A). I transcribed these interviews and identified the general purposes of my possible candidates. I focused on Salasin, Monroe, and StickleyMan because they shared similar “civil” purposes, were most able to articulate how they imagined their audiences, and discussed writing back to their audiences.

The totality of my textual data included each participant's Internet activity, beginning with their participation in each platform and ending January 2014. My rationale for text collection and systematic “data reduction” (Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 397) reflects my larger study's research questions about the ways initial writers change their roles and text in regard to audience. For the larger study, my collection criteria reflected its research questions (Smagorinsky,

2008, p. 395); thus I collected texts that demonstrated textual participation. I used the following four criteria: (a) high levels of attention from the audience,³ (b) writer recognition of audience in the text by addressing specific commenters or groups of commenters, (c) writer consideration of audience attention in our interviews wherein the writer explicitly discussed particular or groups of commenters, and (d) texts explicitly important to the writer as self-reported to me during selection interviews. This led me to a pool of 28 texts for Salasin, 31 texts for Monroe, and 10 for StickleyMan. I want to note here that there were many other texts for StickleyMan in the larger study, but they were GIFs and are thus outside the scope of this article.

Following this second round of data collection, I used open-coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in the program EverNote to code each text and develop analytical categories for the way my participants contended with textual participation from their audiences, either explicitly or implicitly. By explicit, I mean when a writer used a commenter's screen name or used pronouns with a direct referent. By implicit, I mean when a writer addressed a theme or idea from a commenter, even if the writer did not directly use the commenter's screen name. The resulting analytical categories are managing textual participation, responding to textual participation, and seeking/encouraging textual participation (Table 2). Following the production of these categories, I drew on Joseph A. Maxwell's (2004) understanding of memos as "major sources of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks" (p. 225), to write initial memos to five colleagues (and myself) in an attempt to synthesize each participant's holistic understanding of audience from these categories.

After I wrote these initial memos, I conducted a second hour-long semi-structured interview during which I proceeded to inquire further about my participants' perception of audience (for the interview protocol, see Appendix B). I transcribed and open-coded these interviews. These interviews, coupled with my previous categories, allowed me to focus on a coding scheme for the case studies. This round of interviews also enabled me to connect aspects of texts with the participant's self-reported goals. In this sense, this interview enabled me to select the texts for the third discourse-based interview (Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983), in which I asked participants to recall the choices they made about these texts.

Following the transcription of the discourse-based interviews and additional open coding, I was able to develop examples of the ways my participants contended with textual participation from their audience (Table 2). While this table provides an exhaustive list of the strategies used by my participants, this article focuses solely on the writing strategies that are explicitly important to my participants' goal of "continuing the conversation," the last two categories in Table 2. This phrase indicates that the writers considered

Table 2. Categories of Analysis With Accompanying Codes and Examples of Those Codes.

Categories	Code	Examples of strategies
Managing textual participation	Controlling textual participation	- Moving an off-topic exchange to another thread
	Venue formation	- Setting forum rules - Writing out comment policy
Responding to textual participation	Using audience's textual participation	- Direct quoting ^a - Paraphrasing (restating) ^a
	Clarification	- Editing after production ^a
	Acknowledgment of textual participation	- Thanking the audience ^a - Paraphrasing (restating) ^a - Direct quoting ^a
Seeking/encouraging textual participation	Asking	- Question posing ^a
	Reference to audience	- Using named secondary writer(s) ^a

a. Strategies discussed in this article.

their own production in a way that aligned with their aims of “civil” (Salasin and Monroe) and “respectful” (StickleyMan) textual participation from their audiences. For the remainder of this article, I will discuss strategies that arise from this consideration, which are (a) editing after production, (b) quotation, (c) question posing, (d) naming secondary writers, and (e) a multifaceted strategy I label “textual listening.”

Strategies

Editing After Production

All three writers edited initial texts in response to textual participation. While they did not edit or update every text, editing after production commonly assisted the writer in clarifying meaning to their audiences. Salasin edited

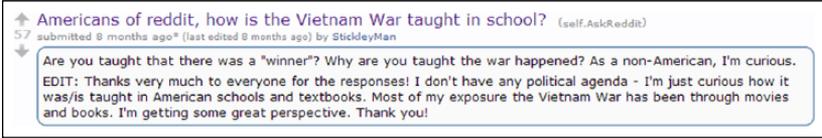


Figure 2. Screenshot of initial text of the “Vietnam Thread.”

blog posts based on audience responses and updated older blog posts based on her perceptions of an imagined readership; 5 out of 28 texts I studied had postproduction edits in response to textual participation. Monroe, in contending with her role as a facilitator, felt the need to monitor a text (about miscarriages) she believed went off-topic. During the time I studied Monroe, Facebook did not allow initial texts to be edited (at the time of this publication, it does). Due to this constraint, Monroe *moved* the entire text, via copy and paste, including her initial text and the texts of secondary writers. While this cumbersome maneuver only occurred once, Monroe expressed a desire for the ability to edit her texts (Discourse-Based Interview). StickleMan, in keeping with Reddit’s convention of updating a long text exchange, added an “EDIT” (Figure 2) once a text had concluded, although on Reddit and other IPI websites texts have the potential to continue almost indefinitely. In StickleMan’s case, the “EDIT” is a generic convention of many online texts, including those on Reddit, arising from the commonplace nature of updating.

While editing in response to the audience is not new, editing after production occurs with a twist: texts that were originally final can be updated in response to a revised imagined audience that is based on actual audience response. When textual revision/addition occurs after a text has been put into circulation, we see more fully that distribution processes intersect with production processes. We might even call these texts “editions” if we used the discourse of publication, although that discourse relies on formalized gate-keeping not applicable to the time-space compression of IPI texts. This twist results in two implications: (a) even when a web-writer publishes and distributes a text online, the production process does not cease, so long as the website’s template allows for updating and (b) when web-writers have the option to update a text, their perception of audience, and thus the text itself, can be influenced by textual participation.

Recall that editing after production serves to clarify the initial writer’s message in many cases. I use Salasin’s blog post “Feminism or Make-Believe” (FMB) to demonstrate concretely an attempt to clarify her meaning and thus continue the conversation. Briefly, FMB centers on rights that

women have achieved in Salasin's lifetime. She edits FMB in response to an audience member's comment. That member's response allowed her to see that her invocation was not taken up because the way she originally addressed the audience was misconstrued. Since WordPress allows for initial texts to be edited after they are posted online and Salasin monitors her comments, Salasin was able to clarify her addressed audience by altering her approach to the text. She literally updated the text to make it more in line with her original intent by changing the execution of her address, in this case from a singular woman to women in general.

FMB addresses women who are unaware of Feminism's hard-fought victories while being open to learning about those victories. Salasin invokes a role for those women to realize all that Feminism has achieved for them. Originally, Salasin began the text as follows: "**I want to write about feminism but I don't know how.** I feel sad when *a friend* blames feminists for society's ills; when she says that the sexual revolution is responsible for the breakdown of the family" (FMB draft; bold in original; italics are mine). In our interviews, Salasin shared that

through a conversation on Facebook with a lot of different people, [it became] really clear that *some* women had an attitude that if we went back to the 1950s or whatever, if we went back, that things would be better. And I really felt the need to talk about feminism from my perspective . . . and say that we really didn't want to go back. So I used this woman . . . I used the idea that I was talking to one person throughout [FMB]. (First Interview; italics added for emphasis)

Salasin's address is to multiple women. But in the original text, she only addressed one woman. The text did not match the address she intended for her entire audience.

The text's original tone, of a direct personal nature, offended a friend of Salasin's who interpreted the word choice of a singular woman as a challenge to their online conversations. The friend voiced her opinion that FMB was a personal attack in a comment that Salasin long ago deleted. Salasin told me, "I wrote the article to be more personal, as if it was a conversation with one friend. Well, one of the people that I was having these conversations with about women's rights was very offended, took it very personally. And so I went back in and made it more generic, less personal. Even though it really wasn't her [addressed in the original text], but I went ahead and shifted that" (First Interview). In direct response to the disdain of this reader, Salasin "shift[ed] the language of the post from a conversation with a friend to an amalgam of many conversations" (First Interview). Salasin changed the introduction of the text in

two places. The opening to FMB now reads: “**I want to write about feminism but I don’t know how.** I feel sad when *I hear friends* blame feminists for society’s ills; when *they say* that the sexual revolution is responsible for the breakdown of the family” (FMB current draft; bold in original; italics indicate the edits). Salasin pluralized the word *friend*, something she was explicit about in our interviews. Thus, her friend’s comment prodded Salasin to alter her sense of the addressed audience informing her strategies for editing the text. Even this small change, because she revised based on audience response, clarifies the address for which Salasin aims: many women.

Salasin’s changes not only demonstrate an explicit shift in her perception of audience, but also a fundamental clarification of how her audience may interpret the text. Salasin’s second revision illustrates a different approach to the text’s attempt at persuasion:

ORIGINAL VERSION: Doesn’t my friend know that families were always disintegrating? Even before birth control. And abortion. And casual sex.

CURRENT VERSION: Families were always disintegrating. Even before birth control. And abortion. And casual sex.

The initial question has the tone of shaming the reader whereas the revision persuades the audience with a forceful, yet more civil, statement. In this way, Salasin’s interaction with her (former) friend leads her to revise the text in order to clarify the text’s exigence.

Important in this example is that Salasin made these changes, which were significant enough for her to report on during our interviews, in response to textual participation. But that participation was not meant for revision. I believe Salasin felt her friend’s comments came from a position that was not open to persuasion or further conversation. One way she chose to continue the conversation is through clarification and revision of the text. Thus, editing after production is one strategy IPI writers can use to continue the conversation.

Quotation

Among the writers I studied, Salasin alone quoted textual participation from the audience in the construction of texts as a way to “join the conversation” (Discourse-Based Interview). This happened in 6 of 28 texts I collected within the larger study. Salasin’s strategy both *acknowledges* and *uses* quotations from her audience illustrating an effort on her part to “recognize the audience” (Second Interview). I present here two texts, “An UnTribute to my Alma Mater” and the follow-up text “UnTribute, Part II,” that exemplify this

aim through a discussion of the closing of Wildwood Catholic High School (WCHS), Salasin's alma mater. While Salasin aimed to clarify her purpose to the audience in the previous example (editing after production), in this instance she broadens the scope of her original text by producing a sequel.

The first text, "An UnTribute to my Alma Mater," intentionally challenges a mind-set Salasin perceived as typical: WCHS closed and many individuals bemoaned, lamented, or eulogized the institution's closing. WCHS, which had been open since 1948, was seeing a sharp decline in enrollment that was causing the school to run at a deficit. According to our interviews, Salasin saw a lot of people in "the newspapers and media lamenting" the closing of the school (Second Interview). Salasin at first tries to address people who she felt had been exposed to an overly negative take on its closing. She meant to provide a counterweight to the media depiction she perceived (see Figure 3).

In "An UnTribute to my Alma Mater," Salasin does not lament the school's closing. The text caused consternation among her audience, as noted when she stated, "some people were hurt and some people were offended by what I wrote and some people were angry and some people were disgusted and some people totally got it. I got all kinds . . . I got phone calls, I got emails, I got comments . . ." (First Interview). As a result of this conflict, Salasin created "UnTribute, Part II," a follow-up text that explicitly uses comments from "An UnTribute to my Alma Mater" in its body. Parts of "UnTribute, Part II" (Figure 4) literally *emerge* from the comments of the first text because Salasin directly quotes comments from "An UnTribute to my Alma Mater."

The follow-up reveals a crucial shift in Salasin's conception of audience in that "UnTribute, Part II" addresses some readers of the first text who mistook her message as attacking WCHS (as opposed to an overly negative portrayal of the school's closing). Importantly, she is only able to do so because her audience textually participates. The sequel illustrates that Salasin reevaluated her audience; they voiced a different reality than she originally thought. The sequel seeks, in an apologetic tone, to put the reader in a state of closure about WCHS.

As this text reveals, Salasin essentially incorporates numerous "letters-to-the-editor" with Salasin simultaneously playing the role of both editor and writer. Salasin takes the tone of a grateful writer by expressing humility, gratitude, and deference. This conciliatory tone reiterates her overall goal of creating civil dialogue with her online writing. She writes about the "range of emotions," and explicitly discusses her surprising feelings of negativity toward the school. She "closes" with an audience comment that mentions "precious" friendship and directly thanks "Trish DiAntonio." She



Wildwood Catholic High

It occurs to me that this subtle sense of vindication isn't an entirely "appropriate" response to the news that my *Alma Mater* is closing. Which makes this piece, *part confessional/part research*, as I ask, *How can I hold animosity toward an institution I left 29 years ago?*

Which then begs the question, *How can I be that old?* No matter though, because all those years fade away when I think back on my days at Wildwood Catholic High. And there I am, 17, in a *pink Handi-Wipe uniform*. I wasn't even Catholic.

When it came to choosing my highschool, my parents disagreed. Neither wanted me to attend their respective Alma Maters. My father could not imagine sending his first daughter into the wilds of his own public high school experience (at Wildwood High), and my mother couldn't imagine inflicting her experience at Catholic on anyone else. (*She had abandoned her childhood faith when the Church refused to marry her, pregnant, to a Protestant/Jew.*)

But when it came to choosing my high school, my father—and the subject of *French*—prevailed. *Wildwood High* didn't offer *French III* and *Catholic* did. (Of course, what they failed to mention upon my registration at Catholic was that although they offered it, I wouldn't be able to take it as a sophomore which was the intention.)

Though it's come up briefly in other places, I've never written directly about my highschool before—and I'm a little nervous about it. Of course, it's easier to bash something or *someone upon death*. And personally, I think it's healthy to do so. A little *Razor's Edge* makes the separation simpler.

And to be fair, lots of "good" took place within those walls for me: I met my first love and had my first kiss. I summoned up the courage to try out for the school play. (*Thank you Peachy, FTT & the cast of Pippin.*) I excelled in the small art classes. I toyed with honors. I recited the *Canterbury Tales* in *Middle English* (*I still remember them!*) And most importantly, I met some of my dearest friends—with whom I am STILL friends. (*Take that, Mrs. Coughlin!*)

So what is it that leaves me strangely satisfied about the school's closing? Is it simply a case of *Alice Cooper's*, "*School's Out for Summer*" with a twisted emphasis on the line, "*Schools Out Forever!*" And who can resist the lyrics, "*School's been blown to pieces! No more pencils, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks.*"



Figure 3. Excerpt from "An UnTribute to my Alma Mater."

displays an appreciation for the readers who engaged with her and she textually acknowledges that her actual readers were not as she imagined. While such a misperception often occurs in print, Salasin is able to address her misperception because she has textual participation, not just written feedback designed for revision.

Most importantly, not all the comments play a role in Salasin's revision to her address and invocation. She is not pandering to her readers in the sense of seeking popularity: Her exigence and purpose alter in the sequel, requiring a new sense of audience. Rather, a select few provide her with an impetus for

Despite this extraction of sweetness from my years at WCHS, the news of its closing unearthed a range of emotions and memories that found their way into my first "assignment," *An Un-Tribute to my Alma Mater*. And by the slew of comments that I received (*better than any "A,"*) my perspective struck a chord with many—often harmonious— and occasionally sour. Of the latter, this one stirs the most:

You were popular and well liked. I'm surprised you don't feel more disappointed at the loss of the school. You too must have had many good memories, there were many fun times. There are still pictures and banners of friend's records there that add to a sense of belonging to something bigger than us. It marks the success of completing a challenge, a place we became adults.

I was surprised about my own "negative" feelings too—which is exactly why I wrote that piece— as part confessional/part exploration. But *John Osborne* continued to put me in my place when he added this about the direct affect the closing had on his family,

My son just got the news of the end of the school. I wish you could sit in our house and see how the wind gets sucked out of a family.

And while fellow alumni *Dan Rosenello '86* shared that he heartily appreciated my "Un-tribute", he closed with this "on the mark" sensitivity,

...For good or bad , it was and is the school where I began my own trip into adulthood, and as such , I will miss it. Godspeed WCHS.

And thus, I'll close Part II of my *Un-Tribute* with the apropos sentiment of a fellow graduate, *Tracy O'Brien '80*.

The most precious thing I took from Wildwood Catholic were my friends, I am still close with them today, and I love them all. I hope people read your letter in the spirit it was written, the truth isn't always pretty, and it isn't all ugly either.

With a special nod to *Trish DiAntonio*, also from the class of '80, who tipped the scale on this second homework assignment, with these words:

I hope you write a follow up! I can't wait to read more.

Figure 4. "UnTribute, Part II."

such changes. In particular, "John Osborne" (a commenter) is the audience member that most persuades Salasin to reconsider her original invocation (Figure 5). His comment persuades her most because he engaged her in a respectful manner. I quote his single comment in its entirety because his comment is the "ideal" comment, according to Salasin (Discourse-Based Interview).

Salasin said that Osborne's comment made her understand "that for some people the loss was really personal" (Discourse-Based Interview). His comment, which was quoted in "UnTribute, Part II," functions as textual evidence of Salasin's process for *adapting* and *using* textual participation. For

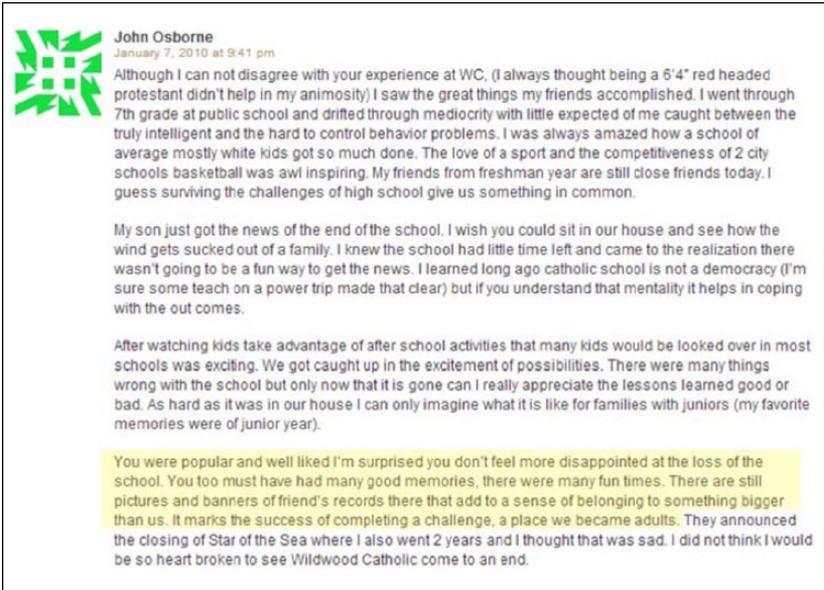


Figure 5. Screenshot of John Osborne's comment (highlight quoted in Figure 3).

web-writers with the aim of inculcating “civil discourse” or “respectful writing,” quotation may be an effective way to acknowledge and use textual participation in the production of future texts.

Question Posing

Question posing is a way in which both Monroe and StickleyMan explicitly encourage textual participation. Monroe asked questions of her group in 8 of 31 texts I collected and in 5 others she explicitly used the phrases “Discuss” or “Please discuss.” Similarly, a crucial aspect of StickleyMan’s strategy was to pose questions in a templated space within Reddit that is specifically designed for such a strategy. This space is a sub-Reddit known as AskReddit. I will focus on StickleyMan’s question posing in regard to continuing conversation in the fifth strategy (textual listening) because his question posing involves two other aspects that give it a different context. Question posing, as I discuss it here, primarily acts as a conversation initiator.

By frequently asking questions of FHP members, Monroe gauges the interests of FHP as an audience. Her overall stated purpose does not change upon learning these interests: She still desires to escape an “echo

chamber” and aims to have online “civil discourse” (First Interview). Question posing allows her to see what audience is going to take up her texts at different moments depending on subject matter. It enables Monroe to determine and redetermine who is reading and what kind of civil conversation will emerge.

When she addresses FHP at-large, Monroe uses the phrases “What say you?” or “What say you, FHP?” Paradigmatic examples of this strategy are shown in Figure 6. Monroe’s question posing strategy is designed to “get people involved in the conversation, to pull them into the conversation” (Second Interview). When I asked her directly about the second example in Figure 6, she responded, “As a journalist . . . you always consider your audience. That’s kind of the first rule of everything” (Second Interview). Posing these short questions often leads to lengthy exchanges between members. In this way, questions serve to move audience members from readers to rhetors—to continue a conversation textually.

Naming Secondary Writers

Naming secondary writers is strategy unique to Monroe. This uniqueness derives from the affordances of Facebook’s template, which allows individuals to be “tagged.” Ten out of 31 of her texts demonstrated some sort of tagging. Tagging refers to naming individual audience members for the purpose of encouraging textual participation. Tagged names are emphasized with blue hyperlinked text that connects to a user’s personal profile webpage. Since all members exhibit some information describing themselves in their profile, the audience for her is not abstract. Additionally, tagged members receive special notification of the text’s production, calling them to participate.

Let me turn to an example to emphasize my point. I have typed out the text in order to keep the participants anonymous because Monroe used their full names:

I’m surprised no one has mentioned the case in here yet, so I’ll get the ball rolling with this piece [[hyperlink](#)] because it touches on stuff in the post a while back that [Member X], [Member Y], [Member Z], and I all discussed. This is why we still need to be much more concerned with the culture of rape than false accusations.

The members’ names—above denoted as X, Y, Z—were all tagged in the earlier post on this same topic (“this piece” in the above). Here she enacts a cooperative relation. Interestingly, only one of three mentioned members replied and Monroe still believed the text a success. When I asked her about the referencing process of this text, we had the following exchange:



Figure 6. Screenshots of two examples of question posing by Monroe.

INTERVIEWER: What is the distinction if someone who is tagged responds?

MONROE: It doesn't matter to me.

INTERVIEWER: And so, is this particular post successful for you?

MONROE: Yeah. I think so. I was actually really surprised that a different member [Not X, Y, or Z] joined in on this one. I was pleasantly surprised. He doesn't participate much in FHP. I didn't even know he was really paying attention anymore.

INTERVIEWER: What was your reaction then? You said you were pleasantly surprised?

MONROE: I was glad that he posted because he's an interesting guy who has got a lot of good experience to bring to light on issues like this because of what he does. . . . (Discourse-Based Interview).

The named audience is not critical for success. In this sense, Monroe does not seek out a particular response even if she explicitly names someone. Naming

secondary writers, as a strategy, functions as a convention for her, used to fashion together her audience in order to *generate* communication. For Monroe, naming secondary writers aims to position multiple members, even those not tagged, to participate rather than control who responds. Naming as a strategy encourages civil debate by prompting exchanges, but not the specifics of that conversation.

Textual Listening

The strategies I have discussed thus far all rely on the incorporation of a single textual element during the initial writer's textual production. In this section, I illustrate how StickleyMan orients other Redditors to engage in an "organic," continuous conversation using a complex technique I call textual listening (Discourse-Based Interview). This concept echoes Krista Ratcliffe's (2005) concept of rhetorical listening, which "signifies a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture" (p. 17). StickleyMan, via textual listening, takes a stance of openness in regard to the cultures, persons, and texts of Reddit. Textual listening enables him to achieve his goals because it prods the audience to respond in an unstructured way that allows a public to form. It is a two-pronged approach. First, textual listening involves expressing sincerity and recognition of a Redditor's comment via thanking and acknowledging another writer's input through paraphrasing. Second, textual listening involves a kind of question posing that continues a conversation with a single announced audience member while accounting for audience members that have yet to announce themselves—strangers who have yet to take up a particular conversation.

StickleyMan employs textual listening in three of the 10 texts I collected. His well-established position on Reddit actually comes from his GIF production where his aim is to be humorous. Textual listening, I believe, is a strategy StickleyMan uses when conversations are about serious or complex issues. Further, I believe StickleyMan's well-known position as a humorous Redditor enables him to have these more serious conversations. StickleyMan, independent of my questioning, brought the following example to my attention because he considered that text to be a representation of the kind of organic discussion he aims for outside of his GIF posts.

For StickleyMan, this technique emerges in the sub-Reddit known as AskReddit. AskReddit is essentially an opportunity to ask the community of Reddit a question and let it respond. Nowhere is textual listening more salient and paradigmatic than in the AskReddit thread on which StickleyMan posed the question, "Americans of reddit, how is the Vietnam War taught in school?"



Figure 7. Screenshot of exchange in Vietnam thread between StickleyMan and Cosmic-Katamari. Mentions of thanks are circled.

(see Figure 2). In this “Vietnam thread,” StickleyMan comments 11 times. In 10 of the 11 instances, he thanks readers and asks them questions in his role as initial writer. In the remaining instance, he makes a lengthier comment about his context and life. In addition to the “thanks” StickleyMan offers in the comments, this initial text is later edited to include two “thank you”s as discussed in the section “Editing after production” (Figure 2).

Originally, the text read as “Are you taught that there was a ‘winner’? Why are you taught the war happened? As a non-American, I’m curious.” With this phrasing, StickleyMan denies any vested political interest, instead constructing his position as one of personal interest. He positions himself as a non-American, wanting to be informed by the strangers of AskReddit. Throughout the thread, he continues to emphasize his openness to others’ perspectives by recognizing participating members via thanking and using an overtly excited tone through exclamation points. He told me that exclamation points help “to create a positive, sincere thread” (Discourse-Based Interview). Figure 7 illustrates the important and consistent use of thanks.

In using “Thanks” or “thank you” and the words “cool” and “appreciate,” StickleyMan expressly recognizes “Cosmic Katamari,” the commenter. Sincerity accompanies StickleyMan’s words of thanks; he textually listens by recognizing the audience member’s input in his reply, picks up the language of the reply, and appears to genuinely desire a type of educational experience with this thread. He neither identifies with the audience nor persuades them toward a particular view, but rather attempts to entice the audience to participate on their terms.

[-] insidia 2 points 8 months ago
 I can tell you how I teach it...

1. I frame it within the context of the Cold War. I want my students to understand why US leaders took the actions they did, and why leaders of other nations responded/acted as they did. We spend a lot of time on the climate of fear that was created, and how we perceived Communism at the time. We also look at which perceptions were grounded in reality (Communist governments tended to kill off a HUGE number of dissidents), and which were not.
2. When we start the actual war, I teach it through the lens of how difficult it is to know the truth of historical narratives when we are faced with conflicting sources. So, we do some big overviews of the historical context (colonialism, basic timeline, involved parties), then I have the students analyze a bunch of primary sources about the Gulf of Tonkin using historical thinking skills like sourcing, corroboration, contextualization, close reading, and reading the silences. Then they have to write a narrative that answers the question, "What really happened in the Gulf of Tonkin?" They also have to talk about their degree of confidence in their analysis.
3. Finally, we look at the war from the perspective of the individual soldier. For this, we read *The Things They Carried*, then videotape an interview with a Vietnam veteran for the Library of Congress Veteran's History Project. It's pretty awesome.

This takes about 5-6 weeks of 2 hours a day, in a combined history/English class. Our school explicitly values depth over breadth, so we cover fewer historical topics in much more depth.

permalink

[-] StickleyMan [5] 1 point 8 months ago
 Very cool to get a teacher's perspective. Thank you!
 Those all sound like really effective and engaging methods of teaching what happened. The third one especially must make things very personal and real for the students. **How do they usually react? Are there any restrictions placed on what you teach through the curriculum or the board?**
 You sound like an awesome teacher and your students are lucky to have you. Thanks again!

Figure 8. Repeated questioning from “Vietnam War” thread; questions highlighted.

Additionally, StickleyMan prods his audience with repeated questioning to keep the thread moving forward. Engaging the audience in this way requires not one initial question, but recurring questioning (Figure 8). Note that he thanks twice. This exchange shows StickleyMan inciting participation in a knowledgeable manner that then dovetails into repeated questioning, thereby forming textual listening. The member “insidia” provides an organized and coherent response, most likely because “insidia” claims to be a teacher.

StickleyMan’s response in this case is indicative of textual listening in three ways. First, he opens his response with the phrase “Very cool to get a teacher’s perspective.” I asked him what the word “cool” means to him here: “It’s just a way of acknowledging and recognizing somebody and their opinion, being like, ‘Yeah okay I digest what you’re saying. That’s cool. Here’s my response to it’” (Discourse-Based Interview). Because Reddit assumes a level of informal tone and word choice, StickleyMan must use a tone that can stand in for a formal level of positivity, while also encouraging a commenter who offers a cogent and engaged response. The phrase “Very cool to get a teacher’s perspective” shows “insidia” that StickleyMan has read the comment and reflected upon it while understanding the appropriate word choice and tone to use in this community. Second, the two instances of thanking “insidia” demonstrate StickleyMan’s encouragement of a positive tone in the thread, reiterating his goals through example. Lastly, he affirms “insidia’s” teaching methods by asking questions that display concrete details from

“insidia’s” comment; he actually references “insidia’s” text and then prods “insidia” with more questions. Since StickleMan’s purpose is to encourage an organic, continuous conversation, he must respond to other Redditors regularly. He also must choose which Redditors to respond to and which to ignore. In this way, textual listening is a multilayered technique aimed at a specific reader *and* readers of the thread at-large. Textual listening encourages continuing already-present *and* future conversations by establishing the initial writer’s willingness to interact.

Summary and Conclusion

In this article, I have identified strategies that IPI writers with the stated purpose of civil discourse (and who aim to “continue the conversation”) use to communicate textually with their audiences: (a) editing after production, (b) quotation, (c) question posing, (d) naming secondary writers, and (e) textual listening. These strategies arise from a continuous reconsideration of their audience, a reconsideration concretized by textual participation.

Ultimately, due to IPI writers’ fluctuating perceptions of audience, the term *audience* may be usefully described as ongoing. Because IPI audiences announce themselves over the course of time within a single text (e.g., online threads) and/or throughout a series of related texts, writers may need to attend textually to the commenters in order to achieve their purposes. In the case studies I have presented, those purposes entail civil aims and therefore require positively engaging commenters’ textual responses. Moreover, if IPI writers perceive audiences as ongoing, they may need to monitor their texts on a frequent and detailed basis.

Before I make my last point, I reiterate here that these strategies are not aimed at developing a reputation, getting monetary compensation, or shutting down trolls. They are self-reported as civil and respectful. They are aimed at continuing online conversations. In other words, these writers already have some sort of participation and want to *continue* receiving it. Of course, continued participation is to be expected, especially since templates in IPI environments have the potential to be filled in repeatedly.

My second point thus hinges on the purposes of these writers within these interactive templates. The strategies in this article illustrate that the tension between writer and audience I previously described is present not only during the composing process but also within the texts themselves. These texts can continually expand (due to IPI templates) and evolve (due to the overarching purpose of the writers I’ve discussed). We can observe writers contending with textual participation (an announced audience) more readily due to frequent text change and text placement. In addition to being part of the composing process, the writer-audience tension is now often part of the texts

themselves. From this viewpoint, we can see what texts have in some ways always been: processes. The implication here is that in IPI environments, texts have the potential to never end, audiences can always be responding, and writers may always be writing.

Appendix A

1. What are your goals when you write, post, or create online texts?
2. What brings you to the Internet? What are your goals for turning to the Internet?
3. What is the purpose of the site in general? What is the writing supposed to look like on this site?
4. What is your purpose for maintaining the sites that you do, continuing to update them? How does this relate to your original, stated purpose?
5. Why did you choose this particular site or digital space for your writing? What drew you to it? How has the site's formatting been influential for your online writings and postings?
6. How has the site's formatting or layout altered your writings and postings? In what ways has the layout and formatting been useful or not useful?
7. How have other users of the site influenced the way you write or post?
8. Please describe your ideal audience. Do you ever encounter this ideal audience? Can you describe your reaction when you encounter this audience?
9. What kinds of audience are you trying to avoid?
10. When you don't encounter your ideal audience, what are some strategies you use to get them to read your texts? How do you react to an audience that isn't ideal?
11. How important is your audience when writing initially?
12. Does the audience ever interfere with your writing goals?
13. How important is audience feedback for what you write in the future?
14. How important is audience feedback or participation?
15. How often do you revise your writing based on audience feedback?

Appendix B

1. In general, what is your reaction when people post or comment on your online writings? Can you describe this process for responding? What makes you decide not to respond?
2. Do commenters (secondary writers) ever post, discuss, or converse about your texts with each other? How do you react to this conversation?

Describe your process for joining this conversation. If not, describe your rationale for not joining this conversation.

3. Do you ever revise your posts or writings based on your audience's comments or responses? How do their posts, comments, writings, or interaction shape your future posts or writings?
4. Are there any consistent commenters? Do you have a special, unique, or different sort of relationship with these consistent commenters?
5. What kind of situation do you encourage or not encourage to create participation and garner attention?
6. In what ways do you ever comment or post on your own writings? What is your purpose for commenting or not?
7. What is your reaction when there aren't any commenters (secondary writers)? How do you adjust your text, if you do?
8. In what ways does your audience(s) shape your future posts?
9. If there are any privacy settings, what is your rationale for setting them the way you do?
10. In what ways do you circulate your writing? In what ways does your audience circulate your writing? How do you know or not know?
11. How does the layout and design encourage or not encourage the circulation of your texts?
12. In what way does circulation intersect with your writing goals?

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank the editor and the anonymous reviewers of *Written Communication* for their insightful feedback on the drafts of this article. He also wants to thank Donna LeCourt, Anne Herrington, Catherine Prendergast, and Spencer Schaffner for their assistance during this various stages of this project. Last, he thanks the three writers who graciously volunteered to be participants in the larger study.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. I requested membership and Monroe granted me access.
2. At the time of our interviews, StickleMan was the fourth most popular Redditor

in terms of “karma,” which is a metric for measuring a Redditor’s influence and publicity. “Karma” is based on an ability to get users attention (known as “upvotes”) and to make useful comments (“comment karma”). He also had the most “commentkarma,” which means that he is generally considered a “good” commenter by Reddit’s aggregating metric.

3. For Salasin and Monroe, I chose texts that had at least 15 comments from the audience. For StickleyMan, this was not feasible because he was the fourth most popular Redditor and had many texts that would qualify. Because Reddit’s template allows users to search through a participant’s texts, I looked at his top 10 texts in terms of aggregated “karma.”

References

- Arola, K. (2010). The design of Web 2.0: The rise of the template, the fall of design. *Computers and Composition, 27*(1), 4-14.
- Bartholomae, D. (1985). Inventing the university. In M. Rose (Ed.), *When a writer can't write: Studies in writer's block and other composing-process problems* (pp. 134-165). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Bizzell, P. (1986). What happens when basic writers come to college? *College Composition and Communication, 37*(3), 294-301.
- Brake, D. R. (2012). Who do they think they're talking to? Framings of the audience by social media users. *International Journal of Communication, 6*, 1056-1076.
- Canter, L. (2013). The misconception of online comment threads. *Journalism Practice, 7*(5), 604-619.
- Chevalier, J. A., & Mayzlin, D. (2006). The effect of word of mouth on sales: Online book reviews. *Journal of Marketing Research, 43*, 345-354.
- Chua, A. Y., & Banerjee, S. (2015). Understanding review helpfulness as a function of reviewer reputation, review rating, and review depth. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology, 66*(2), 354-362.
- Dashti, A. A., Al-Kandari, A. A., & Al-Abdullah, H. H. (2015). The influence of sectarian and tribal discourse in newspapers readers' online comments about freedom of expression, censorship and national unity in Kuwait. *Telematics and Informatics, 32*(2), 245-253.
- Duncan, M. (2011). Polemical ambiguity and the composite audience: Bush's 20 September 2001 speech to Congress and the epistle of 1 John. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 41*(5), 455-471.
- Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (2005). *On the case: Approaches to language and literacy research*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Eberly, R. A. (2000). *Citizen critics*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Edbauer, J. (2005). Unframing models of public distribution: From rhetorical situation to rhetorical ecologies. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 35*(4), 5-24.
- Ede, L., & Lunsford, A. (1984). Audience addressed/audience invoked: The role of audience in composition. *College Composition and Communication, 35*, 155-171.

- Ede, L., & Lunsford, A. (2009). "Among the audience": On audience in an age of new literacies. In A. Gonzalez, E. Weiser, & B. Fehler (Eds.), *Engaging audience: Writing in an age of new literacies* (pp. 42-72). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Gallagher, J. (2014). *Interactive audience and the Internet* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_2/190/
- Gallagher, J. (2015). The rhetorical template. *Computers and Composition*, 35(1), 1-11.
- Gee, J. P. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses, critical perspectives on literacy and education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press.
- Goffman, E. (1981). *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Harvey, D. (1989). *The condition of postmodernity*. London, UK: Basil Blackwell.
- Herrington, A. (1985). Writing in academic settings: A study of the contexts for writing in two college chemical. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 19(4), 331-361.
- Kareklas, I., Muehling, D. D., & Weber, T. (2015). Reexamining health messages in the digital age: A fresh look at source credibility effects. *Journal of Advertising*, 44(2), 88-104.
- Kendall, L. (2009). A response to Christine Hine's "defining project boundaries." In A. N. Markham & N. K. Baym (Eds.), *Internet inquiry: Conversations about method* (pp. 21-25). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Laquintano, T. (2010). Sustained authorship: Digital writing, self-publishing, and the ebook. *Written Communication*, 27(4), 469-493.
- Len-Rios, M. E., Bhandari, M., & Medvedeva, Y. S. (2014). Deliberation of the scientific evidence for breastfeeding: Online comments as social representations. *Science Communication*, 36(6), 778-801.
- Litt, E. (2012). Knock knock. Who's there? The imagined audience. *Journal of Broadcast & Electronic Media*, 56(3), 330-345.
- Loke, J. (2012). Public expressions of private sentiments: Unveiling the pulse of racial tolerance through online news readers' comments. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 23, 235-252.
- Lunsford, A., & Ede, L. (1996). Representing audience: "Successful" discourse and disciplinary critique. *College Composition and Communication*, 47(2), 167-179.
- Malinen, S. (2015). Understanding user participation in online communities: A systematic literature review of empirical studies. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 46, 228-238.
- Marchionni, D. (2015). Online story commenting: An experimental test of conversational journalism and trust. *Journalism Practice*, 9(2), 230-249.
- Marwick, A. E., & boyd, d. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114-133.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2004). *Qualitative research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Molinari, D. L. (2004). The role of social comments in problem-solving groups in an online class. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 2, 89-101.
- Moss-Racusin, C. A., Molenda, A. K., & Cramer, C. R. (2015). Can evidence impact attitudes? Public reactions to evidence of gender bias in STEM fields. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 39(2), 194-209.
- Odell, L., Goswami, D., & Herrington, A. (1983). The discourse-based interview: A procedure for exploring the tacit knowledge of writers in nonacademic settings. In P. Mosenthal, L. Tamor, & S. A. Walmsley (Eds.), *Research on writing: Principles and methods* (pp. 221-236). New York, NY: Longman.
- O'Reilly, T. (2005). *What is Web 2.0? Design patterns and business models for the next generation*. Retrieved from <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>
- Perelman, C., & Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1969). *The new rhetoric: A treatise on argumentation*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Phillips, W. (2015). *This is why we can't have nice things: Mapping the relationship between online trolling and mainstream culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Porter, J. E. (1992). *Audience and rhetoric*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Porter, J. E. (2009). Recovering delivery for digital rhetoric. *Computers and Composition*, 26(4), 207-224.
- Ratcliffe, K. (2005). *Rhetorical listening: Identification, gender, whiteness*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Reader, B. (2012). Free press vs. free speech? The rhetoric of "civility" in regards to anonymous online comments. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 89(3), 495-513.
- Reagle, J. M. (2015). *Reading the comments: Likers, haters, and manipulators at the bottom of the web*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Rickert, T. (2013). *Ambient rhetoric: The attunements of rhetorical being*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Rickly, R. (2007). Messy contexts: Research as a rhetorical situation. In H. A. McKee & D. N. DeVoss (Eds.), *Digital writing research: Technologies, methodologies, and ethical issues* (pp. 377-397). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Rowe, I. (2015). Civility 2.0: A comparative analysis of incivility in online political discussion. *Information, Communication, and Society*, 18(2), 121-138.
- Santana, A. D. (2014a). Controlling the conversation: The availability of commenting forums in online newspapers. *Journalism Studies*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2014.972076
- Santana, A. D. (2014b). Virtuous or vitriolic: The effect of anonymity on civility in online newspaper reader comment boards. *Journalism Practice*, 8(1), 18-33.
- Smagorinsky, P. (2008). The method section as conceptual epicenter in constructing social science research reports. *Written Communication*, 25(3), 389-411.
- Springer, N., Engelmann, I., & Pfaffinger, C. (2015). User comments: Motives and inhibitors to write and read. *Information, Communication, and Society*, 7, 798-815.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sung, K. H., & Lee, M. J. (2015). Do online comments influence the public's attitudes toward an organization? Effects of online comments based on individuals' prior attitudes. *Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied*, *149*(4), 325-338.
- Ürper, D. C., & Çevikel, T. (2014). Editorial policies, journalistic output and reader comments: A comparison of mainstream online newspapers in Turkey. *Journalism Studies*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2014.969491
- Warner, M. (2005). *Publics and protopublics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wolff, W. I. (2013). Interactivity and the invisible: What counts as writing in the age of Web 2.0. *Computers and Composition*, *30*(3), 211-225.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ziegele, M., Breiner, T., & Quiring, O. (2014). What creates interactivity in online news discussions? An exploratory analysis of discussion factors in user comments on news items. *Journal of Communication*, *64*(6), 1111-1138.

Author Biography

John R. Gallagher is a visiting assistant professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He researches participatory Internet writing culture, especially online comments. He is currently working on a book-length manuscript about the way online commenters and reviewers generate conversations through their rhetorical strategies.