

## Making an Effort

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This is not necessarily the most enjoyable essay I've encountered in 20 years of teaching, but I've never enjoyed one more. This, not just because I was tickled to see evidence that someone listened to me (though anyone who's taught will know what a gas that is, and I'm not above acknowledging the pleasure), but because the writer seemed to enjoy writing it (and anyone who's tried to teach English will know how rare that is). I tell my students that pleasure in a topic will not necessarily guarantee a successful paper, but a bored writer will certainly bore her readers. Lindsay did not bore me. Her comments when I asked for permission to print the essay strike me as worth repeating:

I'm a bit worried at other people's reception to this paper. It was written SO with a very specific audience in mind (one person!) I don't think others will get anything out of it. Feel free to chop away. It is true, but my actual epiphany happened at work; my Marc and Reag revelation was an example I had when I was thinking of examples (as recommended) and then decided to use instead to relate to my audience better. My parents didn't actually send money, but they bought me a Swifter Sweeper. As to my musical

background—I took piano and have some theory. Pretty classical background. I love/hate learning guitar. I suck so badly, but the roomies think I'm doing OK (they think I should practice the basics more).

I spend a great deal of time in a composition class emphasizing *audience*; Thurber once said that there's no such thing as good writing, only *rewriting*, and I'd add that good writing is only good because it affects someone. When you're writing in my class, that someone is me; in other classes, at work, in a relationship—well, it's obvious who you are writing for then. Later, you may find that you are writing for audiences that are larger and possibly not known to you. That is, of course, not so easy to do, and this is what's troubling her at this point. But it seems to me that Lindsay clearly knows who she is and what she wants to say, and when she wrote this essay she at least intuitively knew what I could understand and enjoy. I suspect that there are at least some readers of the *Bulletin* who are enough like me that you, too, will enjoy this essay.

And, yes, I've edited it slightly; no, I didn't chop away. I'm just responsible for a certain degree of tidiness: the really good stuff is all Lindsay's. —GWL

This is my third attempt at English 2201. I have never before made an attempt to change my writing. I just kept thinking that, eventually, I'd hit upon a teacher who dug where I was coming from and would pass me. My writing and my life in general were very self-centred. Neither incorporated any sort of concern for or consciousness of the group of people I was playing to. I was thoughtless toward my family, never called, was late for meals, sometimes by a day or two, and the crew was beginning to express displeasure (read: would give me no money). I was often late to work, showed little consideration toward our customers or my co-workers and went mechanically about my tasks, so, to say the least, there was some workplace tension going on. (read: 2 week suspension, nearly fired). My terrible attendance record at school did nothing to strengthen my poor grades (see opening sentence), and my essays were more self-indulgent tableaux of my thoughts at the time. Because I didn't care what anyone thought of me, I made no effort to present myself in a positive manner or make any changes to improve myself. My lack of consciousness of my audience ensured that I took no steps to grow as a family member, employee, student, or person.

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I moved in with Marc (just a roommate! Wanted to make that clear) four months ago. He's been playing the guitar for a very long time. His playing is spectacular! It's fast, fairly technical, has interesting rhythms, and sounds great. But in the first three months I lived there, his playing did not change or progress one bit. Marc does not play guitar for anyone but himself. The few times he played for me, his posture was guarded. (When I was smashed once, I told him he played "jealously" and hoarded music.) He had little-to-no contact with other guitarists and was making no technical or stylistic headway.

In the last month, Reagan moved in. He's terrible in comparison to Marc, but when Marc plays, Reagan listens with his whole body. He tries new fingerings, experiments with the rhythms, learns new riffs, and questions everything. He's been an enormous kick to Marc, who now finds himself with a student, a guinea pig, an audience, and a teacher. Marc's playing is being challenged for the first time since I've known him. In the month since we met Reagan, Marc's guitar has been a hotbed of new riffs, rhythms, and ideas.

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The first night of class, you talked about writing for an audience. I missed a lot of that; I was mostly asleep after a day

of customary non-effort, but I caught something about writing being primarily a tool for communication with an audience. I wrote it down in case I was going to be tested on it later and went back to Z-land. That night after class, I was in the living room with the guys, lost in thought as they messed around on their guitars. Marc was teaching Reagan a song he'd been writing, and Reag thought it could use a little improvement; the fingering for one of the chords was a bit off for the sound they thought worked. They went through every fingering they could invent for the sound and flow they wanted. I was thinking to myself how much Marc's playing was changing since Reagan arrived. Marc never would have thought of changing that chord—he'd been content with the old one until Reagan brought it up and Marc realized it could be better. Having an audience of just one person brought more change in one month than three months (and how many years?) without.

That's when my brain clicked in to what you had been saying about writing to an audience. You had said that first and foremost, essay writing was about communication with the group of people who would be reading what you had written. Suddenly

I realized that I had never written an essay for any kind of audience but myself. I had never concerned myself with what perceptions my personal audiences at home, work, or school had of me. No wonder my performance in every area was on the downslide; no wonder I had a binder full of F and D essays. The lines between my audience(s) and me were in bad shape.

After my little revelation, I was up for a while, thinking of the ways I wanted to portray myself to the people I come into contact with. I'm still experimenting with the changes, but just now, everything's coming up roses (sorry, saw Gypsy). After showing up on time for work consistently for a week and concentrating on the customers' needs, co-worker relations have been much less tense. I gave my family a call to say I appreciated them and kind of missed them. They're sending me money! And I actually thought out this essay, and it might not get an F! (Knock wood.) At any rate, I'm making an effort for the first time since grade school. If it doesn't work out, well, at least I've expanded the guitar audience pool at home. I picked up a guitar for the first time on Sunday. I wonder what we'll add to each other with the three of us!