

AUDIENCE WORKSHEET

Goals of Each Part:

Part I: To understand how low-level decisions (word choice, sentence structure) can modulate interpretation and perception.

Part II: To become more comfortable writing in different styles, AND to be able to look critically at a piece of writing and ask “What’s missing?”

Part III: To further improve genre familiarity, AND to target a specific audience for one’s writing.

----- *ACTIVITY STARTS BELOW* -----

As evident in both comedy and general existence, *how* you say something matters almost as much as *what* you say. For example, consider the following two answers to the question “What are you doing today?”:

Speaker A: “I have to clean.”

Speaker B: “I should clean.”

Speaker C: “I forgot to clean.”

All three speakers convey the same general idea, but how they do so carries vastly different interpretations.¹ Along these lines, very small choices in your writing can drastically impact the reader’s experience. In this activity, we’ll focus on the interaction between language, style, and delivery, paying particular attention to the writing choices that we make and why we make them.

¹ To the curious student, I ask: who do you think is more likely to clean, and why?

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PART I (5-10 minutes):

In the first part of this activity, we will examine low-level writing decisions: diction, sentence structure, etc.

In groups of three, you will read a short passage that has its thesis statement removed. After reading the passage, you will be presented with three possible continuations of the passage. Consider each of the options – what do they do well? What do they do poorly? – and select your group’s preferred continuation.

Write a short explanation as to why you chose your choice, and also suggest some alterations to improve the statement. Importantly, note that *there is no right answer and that all three continuations would benefit from some revision*.

Passage: Behind the laughter and quick wit, there lies an undercurrent of vulnerability that defines the essence of a comedian. To stand on a stage and share one’s innermost thoughts and experiences requires immense bravery. Comedians often draw from their own personal struggles, insecurities, and failures, turning them into relatable and humorous anecdotes. In doing so, they invite their audience into a shared space of vulnerability, fostering a sense of empathy and connection.

Continuation I: By fearlessly opening up about their personal struggles and failures, a comedian demonstrates extraordinary courage and resilience, resulting in a remarkable enhancement of their comedic performances and establishing a profound sense of relatability with audiences.

Continuation II: A comedian’s willingness to share their personal struggles and failures demonstrates their courage and resilience, both enhancing their comedic performances and fostering a sense of relatability with their audience.

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Continuation III: The vulnerability displayed by comedians on stage plays a crucial role in establishing a genuine connection with the audience, fostering empathy, and creating a shared space where laughter and healing can occur.

REASONING:

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PART II (10-15 minutes):

Nice job! In the next part of this activity, we will actually *write*, with the ultimate goal of writing in a style designed for a specific goal/audience.

Return to your groups of three. We will now read a few different passages that are intended for different audiences. However, you'll note that some sentences have been left blank and are followed by a parenthetical statement: it is your group's job to fill in the blank with a possible continuation; to give you a starting point, the parenthetical statement provides some guidance on what your sentence should generally convey, though the actual implementation is up to you and your talented writer brains. After finishing your completion, briefly mark down *how* and *why* you made the choices that you made. At the end of this part, we will discuss the strategies that people used and how that achieved their goal.

Passage A: Pop Tarts and calzones, seemingly different in appearance and taste, share a surprising commonality that sparks a whimsical culinary debate. Some passionate food enthusiasts argue that Pop Tarts can be considered a variation of calzones. _____
_____. (a statement on the general similarity between Pop Tarts and calzones). Exploring this playful comparison sheds light on the versatility of these delightful pastries and ignites discussions on the boundaries of culinary categorization.

REASONING:

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Passage B: There lived a cheeky and adventurous seagull named Sammy. One bright morning, as the

sun painted the sky with shades of gold and orange, Sammy spotted a magnificent eagle

named Eleanor. Her wings bore the colors of the setting sun, and her eyes, like molten

gold, shone with an intensity that took Sammy's breath away.

Sammy decided to approach Eleanor, his feathers fluffed just right and his wings

executing an elegant mid-air pirouette. "Eleanor, my dear, you are the most elegant bird

I've ever had the pleasure of meeting," Sammy squawked.

Eleanor turned to Sammy and looked sad. _____

(Eleanor rejecting Sammy), she said to Sammy. But thank you. With that, she returned

her focus on the horizon, leaving Sammy with a deflated heart and a lesson learned: _____

(the lesson that Sammy learned).

REASONING:

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Passage C: Oh, mangos, those seemingly innocent tropical delights that have managed to infiltrate

our kitchens, fruit bowls, and smoothie recipes. But let's be honest folks – it's high time

that we confronted the mango menace head-on and made the bold move to outlaw these

deceptively sugary saboteurs. _____

_____ (thesis statement about banning mangos in

favor (flavor?) of other fruits)

First and foremost, mangos are clearly engaged in a sinister plot to drive us all bananas. The

Mango industry is an elaborate and highly organized operation that keeps us hooked on

their fruity contraband. Think about it: they're available year-round, everywhere! Don't

other fruits deserve more attention?

REASONING:

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PART III (10-15 minutes):

Now that you've gained some experience writing in different styles, let's move to writing larger passages for a specific audience. In this part of the assignment, we will focus on capturing the same narrative using a variety of different styles. First, read the following passage:

Kenta sighed: the pantry was empty. To his hungry brain, there were two options. One. He could do what he'd done the last time this had happened (just stay hungry until morning). Or, two. He could buckle up and go to the 24-hour convenience store to get something that would hold him over through the night. 'What would Mom do?', he thought. He sighed – again – at her answer as he slipped on his shoes. It was even more humid than the usual summer night. Regardless, the walk was short, the cashier was nice, and the pretzels hit the spot. Time for bed.

Now, choose two of the following writing styles/genres, and rewrite² the passage (a paragraph or so) in your group of three:

- High fantasy (aka goblins, swords, royalty, etc.)
- A “neutral” news report (either a written article or a script meant to be delivered on video)
 - No piece of writing is truly neutral, but do your best if you choose this option!
- An academic article that engages with the morality of hunger and its emotional repercussions; include a thesis statement.

After your rewrites, briefly mark down some of the reasons *why* you made the decisions that you did. What were you trying to capture, and how did you do it? We will share the reasons for your decisions – and the passages, if you are interested and open to sharing them – with the rest of the class.

² “Rewrite” here can mean a bunch of different things – going line by line and revising, capturing the general idea but changing the structure, mixing the order around or reframing the delivery, etc. Be creative, and trust your gut! 😊

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And, as always, feel free to live it up! Be bold, but be reasoned.

REWRITE:

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REASONING:

-----*ACTIVITY ENDS*-----

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Activity Rationale:

I want you to start thinking about how micro-level decisions – diction, syntactic structure, voice, etc. – can have macro-level impacts on the overall interpretation of a piece, where “piece” could be anything from a scientific journal article to a stand-up comedy routine to a crossword puzzle clue. In this activity, we build the relevant reasoning piece-by-piece. In Part I, we considered a number of different continuations of the same text and think about how subtle decisions change our interpretations. In particular, I wanted you to *read before writing*, as it may be the first time that some of you have deeply considered these kinds of writing decisions. After we’d “warmed up” a bit, you had the chance to actually engage with the texts in Part II, asking you to get in the mind of the writer and seriously consider a number of important stylistic decisions. Said another way, Part II tries to crack open the creatively-critical mind to help you engage with writing – especially your own – at a stylistic level. Then, Part III moves from the sentence-level to the discourse level: you had to consider the overall message in relation to the intended audience, and then construct a sequence of *deliberate*, low-levels decisions to achieve their goal. I hope that you found these activities fun!