

My heuristic for developing a concept of audience is written in two categories: Practical facts about the audience and audience and document purpose and style.

Like Brent Henze in his chapter featured in *Solving Problems in Technical Communication* entitled “What do Technical Communicators Need to Know about Genre?”, I divided my set of questions into different categories so that the writer can more easily assess the importance of each question to his/her particular task. I chose these two categories because audience analysis is inextricably intertwined with document purpose and style. Once a writer knows who her audience is, where the audience members work, and where they are located geographically and culturally, she can make better decisions about document design, and can more easily determine how her audience will use the document and why they need or want it.

Marjorie Hovde identifies different categories for heuristic questions as well. I include questions about the “broad picture of [the] users” (Hovde 411) and about the document’s purpose and style, which will give the technical writer analyzing her audience a strong foundation upon which to build her audience conception. It would be very difficult to argue against Hovde when she says that “ideally, writers need access to representatives of audience members to shape perceptions of audience early in the document-design cycle” (Hovde 427); but much like the writers in her case study, I assumed that writers using my heuristic would not have “direct, two-way communication” (Hovde 411) with their users. Rather, writers who will use my heuristic will use it because they are working with co-workers, against certain organizational constraints or physical constraints, to analyze their audiences.

Applying the heuristic:

In my current position as a technical writing intern with a small defense contractor, one of my tasks is compiling training materials for a class that my contractor will teach in the Middle East. The questions I wrote for my heuristic are questions I have repeatedly asked myself while preparing these training materials.

Practical facts about the audience (Hovde’s “broad picture of users,” page 411)

1. Who are the audience members? What type of work do they do?

The audience members are engineers who will focus on purchasing software systems rather than developing them, but require an understanding of the aspects of systems engineering to make the best purchasing decisions.

2. If the audience is outside of the United States, where are its members

located? In what culture are these audience members situated?

My audience is located in the United Arab Emirates, the majority of them are male, and they are Muslim.

3. What is the audience's opinion of the company that the writer works for?

The audience has had prior experience with one of our sub-contractors, but has not used my defense contractor for training, products, or services in the past. To my knowledge, their communication with my company's sub-contractor has all be satisfactory.

Audience and document purpose and style

1. How will the audience use this document? What is the "context of use of the documentation" (Hovde page 411)?

The document is a series of powerpoint slides that will be presented to the audience in a four-day crash course in engineering and management.

2. Why does the audience need this document?

The audience needs this four-day course to establish wise purchasing practices.

3. What is the audience's main goal in using this document?

To gain an understanding of the products and systems that are presented to them as possible purchases.

4. How can this document help them accomplish this goal?

Teaches them the skills they need to recognize a system that was engineered well, and a system that will fit their particular needs.

5. How much time will they have to review this document?

The course is four days, they will keep copies of the slides and whatever notes they recorded. The knowledge will hopefully last a long time and serve them well.

6. Does this audience have any need for special consideration of disabilities, such as blindness?

None that I am aware of.

The questions I pose in my heuristic help me edit the content of the class PowerPoint to be as helpful as possible. The broad picture questions help me establish that the audience will come into the four-day course with prior knowledge about systems engineering, and thus that this course material should be concise and should reflect and build upon this prior knowledge to help them apply it in the near future. Since I am not collecting and editing content that is unknown to the audience, I have a better idea of when to cut parts of the class text which might ramble about a subject that is already well-understood. I also know what tone I want to use, because I know that I need to contribute to the already positive ethos that the audience perceives in my contractor. Of course, the ethos of this particular

document will also be heavily influenced by the instructor the contractor sends to the U.A.E., but I can do everything in my power to shape the text into a tone of mutual respect mixed with a bit of pedagogical wisdom. Once I was able to answer these questions about my audience, I gained a deeper understanding of what purpose this PowerPoint is going to serve and the ways in which my audience will use it to achieve their goals.

Works Cited

Henze, Brent. "What Do Technical Communicators Need to Know About Genre?" *Solving Problems in Technical Communication*. Ed. Johndan Johnson-Eliola and Stuart A. Selber. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2013. 337-362. Print.

Hovde, Marjorie. "Tactics for Building Images of Audience in Organizational Contexts: Ethnographic Study of Technical Communicators." *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 14.4(2000): 395-444. Web. 17 September 2014.