

Readers as 'Reached', 'Imagined',
and 'Constructed':

A Longitudinal Study of Undergraduate
Writers' Developing Conceptions of
Audience

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DEVELOPING WRITERS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Longitudinal Study

Anne Ruggles Gere, *editor*

Developing Writers in Higher Education

- University of Michigan Press, 2019
- Anne Ruggles Gere, Editor

Participants

- 169 University of Michigan students
 - 60 writing minors, 109 non-minors
 - 137 women, 32 men
 - 47 disciplinary majors



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Data Collection and Analysis

322 surveys

- Completed by minors and non-minors during second year and at graduation

131 interviews

- Completed by a subset of minors and non-minors as they entered the study and upon graduation

2,406 pieces of writing

- 94 eportfolios produced by writing minors
- Archive of writing produced by non-minors over four years at Michigan

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The Sweetland Minor in Writing

Your words matter.

The Sweetland Minor in Writing gives you the tools not merely to “write for the professor,” but to produce compelling, accessible writing for a wide range of audiences and purposes. In addition, you will receive the foundational writing and critical thinking skills necessary for today’s competitive job market.

If you are an undergraduate student who is interested in developing further as a writer, both in and beyond their major, and who wants to join a vibrant community of writers, we invite you to apply! Our Minors come from departments all over campus, with diverse backgrounds, interests, and talents that unite to create a truly dynamic, project-based program. In both an introductory and advanced course, students receive the support and skills to create the kinds of work they would like to see in the world. We encourage experimentation and value failure as part of success. Minors may also choose to participate in [our student-run journal](#) and attend public events created with them in mind, including a [writer interview series](#) co-sponsored by WCBN Radio and Literati.

“My minor secured me a job before I even graduated. During my first phone interview, my boss said, “A minor in writing”

How do students talk about audience?

Interviewer: What would you say it means to write well? What do you think good writing looks like?

Christine: Gosh, I mean, something that isn't, that doesn't sound awkward. It makes sense. Sentences flow from one another. It's written in a tone that's appropriate for its audience. The reader likes to read it.



Two years later ...

Christine: I think to write well is to have your reader or your audience, whatever the situation may be, leave your piece of writing without confusion or wanting specific questions answered that you didn't give enough time to. I mean, if they can walk away from your piece and have a full understanding of what you were trying to say, I think that that's writing well.



Writing development & metalinguistic development

- ▶ Much of expert writing knowledge is tacit (*e.g.*, Giltrow & Valiquette, 1994; Paré, 2011; Thaiss and Zawacki, 2006)
- ▶ Explicit knowledge does not necessarily correlate with successful production (*e.g.*, Anson, 2016; Donahue, 2012; Nowacek, 2011)
- ▶ But, some scholarship shows the **benefits and possibilities** of developing writers' **explicit** knowledge of writing and language (*e.g.*, Aull, 2015; Cheng, 2008; Jarratt, 2009; Lancaster & Olinger, 2014; Melzer, 2009; Yancey, Robertson, & Taczak, 2014)

Semi-structured interview questions

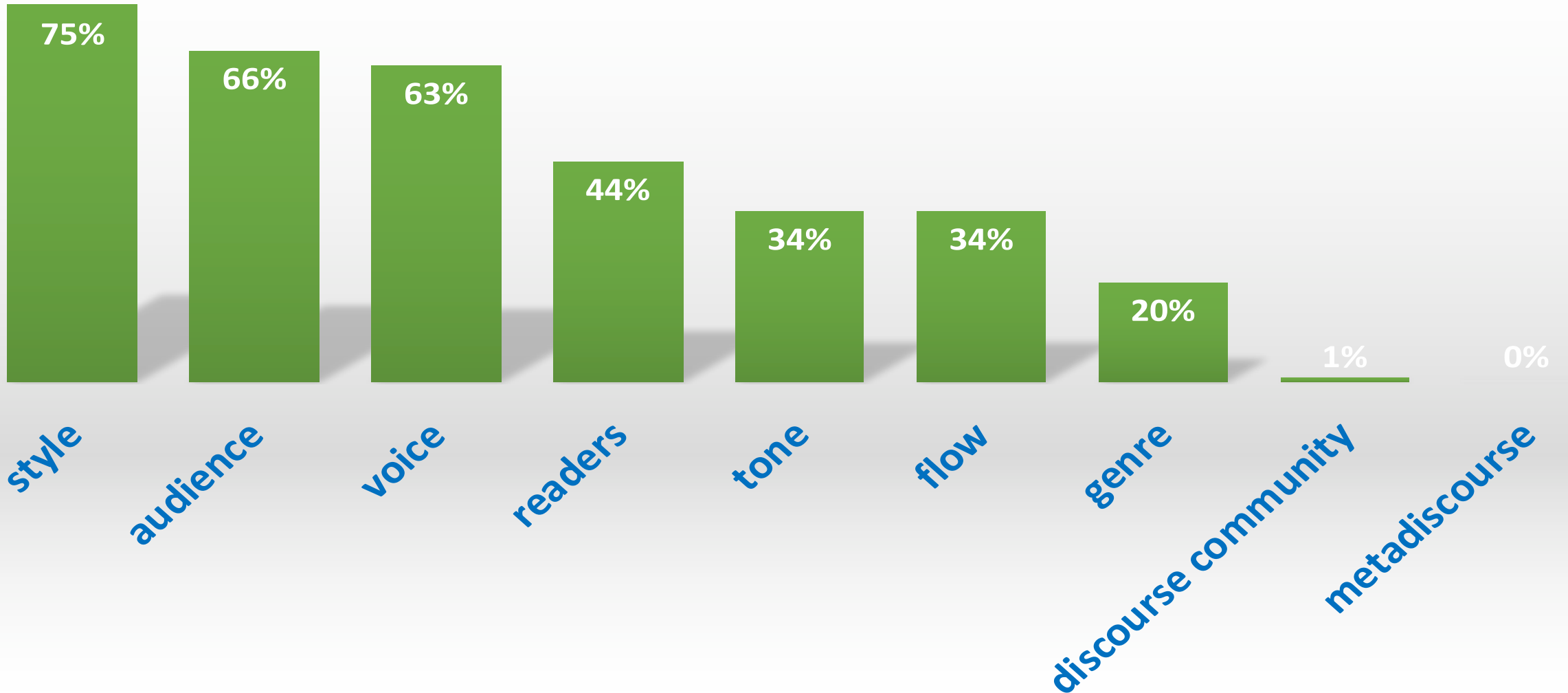


131 interviews & subset of writing

- ▶ Identities as writers
- ▶ Explanations of writing development
- ▶ Perceptions of coursework writing
- ▶ Definitions of “good university-level writing”

WHAT ARE SOME TOP METALINGUISTIC
CONCEPTS STUDENTS USE IN
INTERVIEWS?

Audience-related concepts among 131 interviewees



Style has multiple references

1. *Style* as individual language use (58 participants)

- “**My writing style** is mainly descriptive.” (Dan, Exit)
- “You have to think about **your own individual style**.” (Grace, Exit)

2. *Style* as register (57 participants)

- “... when you're writing **journalistic style** ...” (Brian, Exit)
- “... like a more **concise, concrete, direct style of writing**.” (Lisa, Exit)

Style has multiple references

3. *Style* as usage conventions (32 participants)

- “He has a lot of **grammar-style things**.” (Dan, Exit)
- “When you do social science you do APA. When you do this, you do **Chicago-style**.” (Lisa, Exit)

4. *Style* as genre (11 participants)

- “**Memo-style** was huge [in the business school]. Then **cover letter** like I said.” (Madeleine, Exit)
- “Almost like a **research report**. Almost like a-not interview style, but like a column on a certain topic.” (Teresa, Exit)

Voice has fewer references

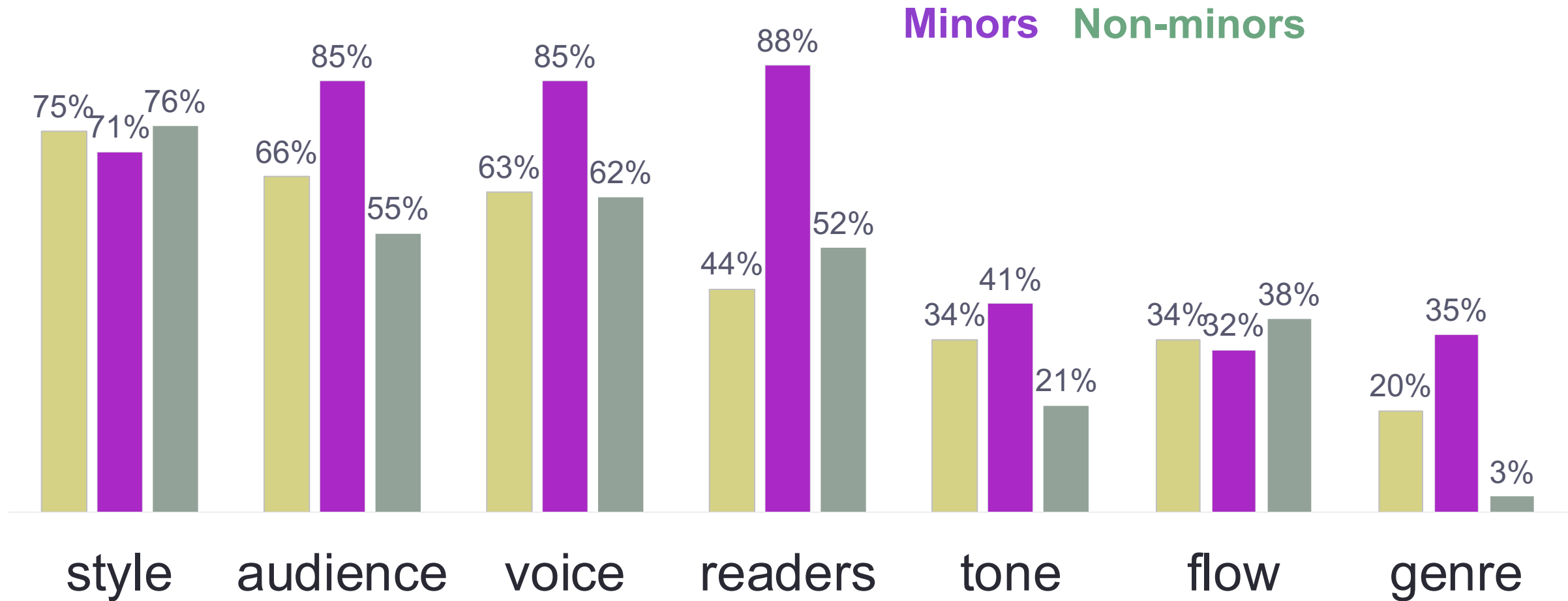
1. Individual conceptions (39 participants)

- “I think you need to **have a voice for yourself that expresses who you are.**” (Exit)
- “Also, just being persuasive and **having your own writing voice.**” (Entry”)

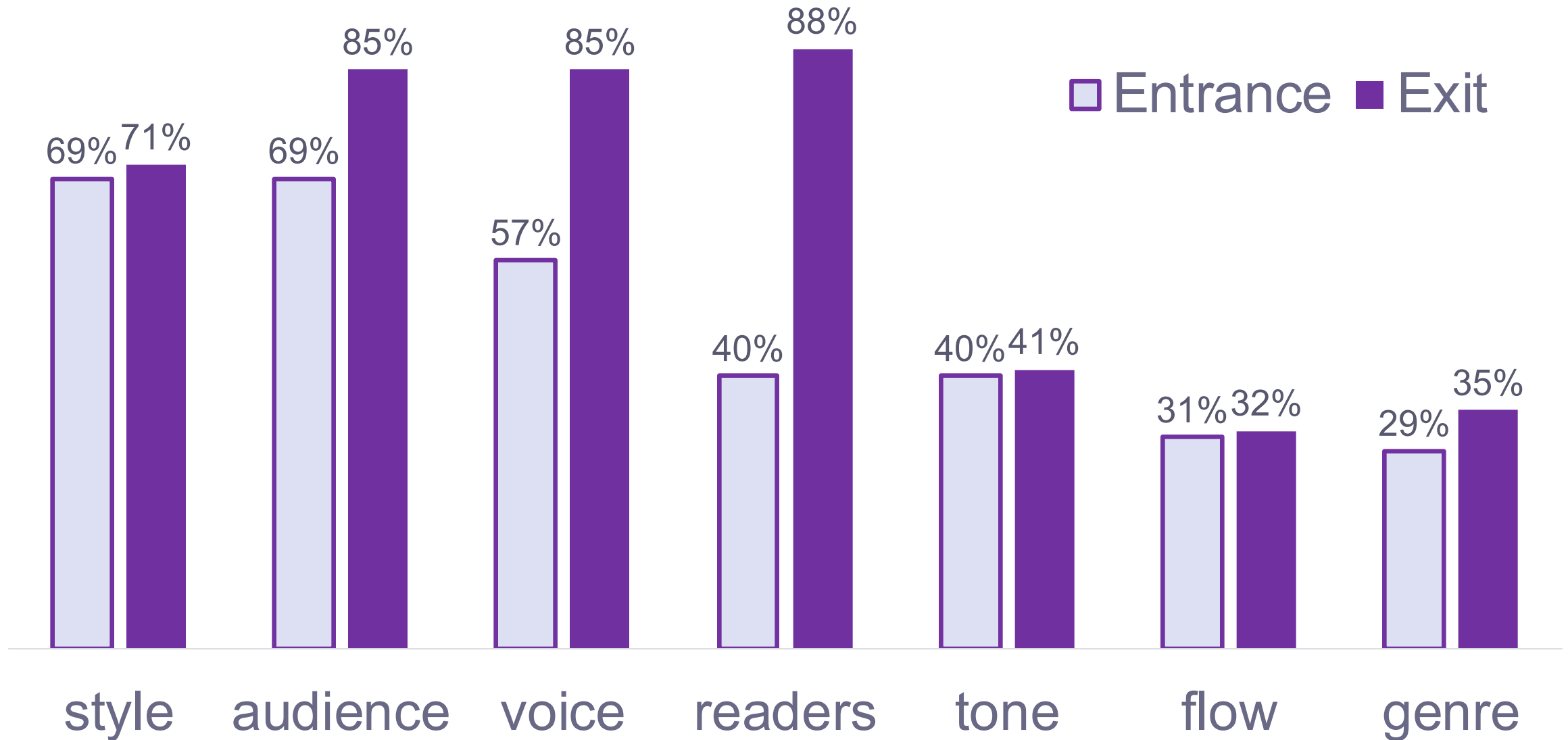
2. Social conceptions (20 participants)

- “Besides that it was **a very different voice** because it was so research based.” (Exit)
- “A quick **text message kind of voice.**” (Exit)

Compared to non-minors, the minors referred more to 'audience' and 'voice'



These references increased over two years



QUESTIONS

1. How (if at all) did the minors' conceptions of audience shift?
2. What factors shaped minors' increased attention to audience and voice?
3. What qualities of students' talk about texts (in light of their actual texts) showed signs of weakness?

Entrance tendency: 1) *Audience as singular and monolithic*

Q: Writing experiences so far?

A: I guess one interesting thing is I started working at *The Michigan Daily*. And there I definitely got more exposure to **audience-based writing**. I also worked for the VP of student affairs office doing newsletter writing. I have really enjoyed that kind of I'd say **more practical writing for audiences**.

Entrance tendency: 1) *Audience as singular and monolithic*

Q: How have you developed as a writer?

A: Starting end of freshman year, it was realizing the importance of drafts and how you need to keep going back to it and rereading what you wrote, how being in the moment and leaving the draft there for a day, it changes your perception.

Then with business, I think I've learned to be more reader-focused. It's like if I'm actually talking directly to a reader instead of just writing a paper to submit for a grade.

Entrance tendency: 2) *There's no audience in academic writing*

- I don't like academic writing where I have to take myself out—my voice out of whatever I'm writing. I like journal writing and blogging and I like some professional writing where my voice can be present and I'm trying to convey something specific to the reader.
- A lot of times when you're writing a lit analysis or you're writing a research paper or whatever, it's easy to forget that you're allowed to have a voice, whereas in the minor, [my instructor] really encouraged that.

Exit tendency : 1) *Audience as disciplinary community*

When you're writing science, a lot of it is in passive voice, or all almost all passive voice, and so then you have to flip back when you're writing anywhere else. This is how scientists write, this is me being a scientist, and over here is how historians write. Again that's one of those, how am I gonna **adapt myself as a writer when I'm writing for a certain audience, how am I gonna adapt my writing?**

“We talk a lot about audience [...] **The discipline of literary criticism is your audience**, and who is that, and how are we part of that, and so how can you respond to them and all that.” (p. 74)

- Instructor of literature

Wilder, L. (2012). Rhetorical strategies and genre conventions in literary studies: Teaching and writing in the disciplines. SIU Press.

Exit tendency: 2) *Balancing multiple audiences*

For my podcast, I definitely grew as a writer, because I was thinking more about how do I keep something varied, but at the same time keep something understandable? It posed a really interesting challenge of, how do you simultaneously make something understandable and interesting to a **general audience**, but still relevant to the audience I'm looking at, which is **a very particular niche audience**. And then on top of that, how do I package the whole thing, the podcast and all the writing apparatus, in a way that makes sense to **Shelley**?

Exit tendency: 3) *Connections between audience, voice, and genre*

I'd say one developing area is how **I can mold my style or writing to any different venue or audience and purpose** for what I'm writing. If it's a research academic paper in my history courses, I know to be more formal in style and to cite studies. If I'm doing a creative, non-fiction piece, I can put my voice into it more and have my personality show through.

Exit tendency: 3) *Connections between audience, voice, and genre*

So I don't have a one-size fits all voice. I mean, my writing voice depends on which circumstance I'm in. I definitely use a different writing voice when I'm writing online than when I'm writing an academic paper. I mean, online I've been things from witty to sometimes a little snarky, I admit it, to more fun and upbeat. I mean, I recently completed an internship at I don't know if you've heard of this magazine *Tiger Beat*? It's for thirteen year old teen girls about celebrities. Obviously, I wasn't snarky there. I was peppy and energetic. I don't know. **You really have to adapt your voice to the situation. ...**

"Essentially, then, **audience** represents the writer's awareness of the circumstances which define a rhetorical context and the ways that the current text is related to or aligned with other texts. Writers construct an audience by drawing on their knowledge of texts they have encountered in similar settings in the past, either as readers or writers, and by relying on readers' abilities to similarly recognize intertextuality, or resemblances, between texts."

– Ken Hyland (2005), *Metadiscourse*, p. 12

Exit tendency: 3) *Connections between audience, voice, and genre*

Kaitlyn, Exit: "By the end [of the remediation assignment] I'd taken a lit analysis that I'd written on this book about cultural diaspora, and then turned it into a conversation about sexual hegemony. It was something that I really cared about and [my instructor] helped me find *Bitch Magazine* and so that helped me write it in **that voice where** it was engaging more with the ideas and in a kind of fun way.

Kaitlyn, Entrance: "I think that the gateway course really helped me realize that, 'Oh, I am allowed to write from my perspective and **have my voice and my flavor and help put the 'me' in my writing**'."

Q2: What factors shaped minors' increased attention to audience and voice?

1) Peer review: re-seeing through readers' eyes

I'd truly say peer review was transformative. I always have in my head this is what I'm conveying, but when somebody else with a different life experience or with just a different set of eyes looks at it and says, "I totally got something else," that's really valuable information that you can't get by yourself. **I think that's my favorite reason for working with other writers is just they see things that I don't or they see it in a different way ...**

1) Peer review: shaping drafts

We did so much peer-reviewing in the gateway and in 325 especially that I think it really paid off in the end. I can't say I always loved it [*laughter*] yeah, **I mean it was a drag sometimes, but after loads of practice I found I really began getting into the heads of my readers while writing.** In 325 especially, where we stayed with the same review partners the whole class and wrote like a gazillion essays, **I began to really anticipate their comments** and [...] yeah, for sure, I think it really helped me to be like very conscientious about how I'm coming off and if I'm explaining each point in a way that outsider readers can understand.

2) Repurposing texts

“In the capstone course, we had to repurpose a formal research paper for a public-facing audience. That was absolutely pivotal for me. I mean, it didn’t go well [*laughter*]. I realized I struggled to get a public audience as excited as I was about this one literary concept.

Understanding the McGuffin Through Analysis of Those Present in Kazuo Ishiguro’s Novel *Never Let Me Go*

By:

March 6, 2019



What is a McGuffin? When many people first hear, or see it, they probably think it’s a last name like I did the first time I learned of the McGuffin. What they don’t know is that this is a device found in many novels, and an idea that can even be applied to our day-to-day lives.

Most often associated with famous film director and producer, Alfred Hitchcock, the McGuffin device is defined by contemporary philosopher, Slavoj Zizek in his book *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock* as “a pure semblance: in itself it is totally indifferent and, by structural necessity, absent” (6). This notion of absence

2) Repurposing texts

“What I did was I turned my final paper in sociology [...,] into an informative pamphlet for UM students and staff. Yeah, I’m really proud of it. It was hard work kind of opening up this dense research area.”

Ways To Help Yourself And Your Community As A Bisexual

- Be visible
- Speak up
- Form communities
- Support one another
- Reach out for help or resources
- Educate those around you on bisexual issues
- Conduct research on the issue

Resources Available

Bisexual Resource Center
<https://biresource.org/>

GLAAD
<https://www.glaad.org/bisexual/resources>

Journal of Bisexuality
<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/wjbiz0/.UaDtKOse5Xk>

What Can I Do To Help?

As A Straight Ally

- Educate yourself on bisexual matters
- Call out biphobia when you see it
- Support your bisexual friends
- Give a voice to bisexuals by passing the mic
- Conduct research on the issue

As A LGBTQ+ Ally

- All of the actions listed above plus the ones below
- Actively include bisexuals in LGBTQ+ spaces
- Listen to bisexuals’ complaints even if they are about your specific community

Biphobia and Bisexual Erasure

What is bisexuality?

Bisexuality is the capacity for emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction to more than one gender/sex. A person who identifies as bisexual affirms this complexity and acknowledges a reality beyond the either/or dualities of heterosexism. (The LGBT Resource Center at UC San Diego)



Bisexual Population

Among LGBTQIA+ identified individuals, 40% identify as bisexual, gay men are 36% of the sample, followed by lesbians (19%) and transgender adults (5%)

2) Repurposing texts

“I was challenging myself not to take paper and put it online, but make something that was created online and lives online. The content was made for that form. I think that was the biggest difference in my mind.”



3) Tasks that make audience explicit

Yeah, so I took Coates's history of America's course Fall of junior year [...] We were told to write our papers to actual grad students in UM's history department. [...] The prompt was super specific, like 'your reason for writing is to offer a review of a book so that grad students could make up their minds about whether to read it or not'. I found that task really interesting, and I really found it easier to write than the standard research paper.

Coates's assignment goals (book review)

- “The end goal is to write a review of any book related to the history of the Americas and the World since 1500.
- You should imagine that **your audience** consists of **graduate students in history** who are writing a research paper on a related topic. They will not have read your book, and will be reading your review in order to understand what the book is about (content) and whether or not it can be relied upon (evaluation).
- ***Note that a book *review* is not the same thing as a book *report*. A review ... also presents an analysis of its aims, methods, and conclusions, and evaluates its strengths and weaknesses.”

Coates's learning outcomes (book review)

“This assignment will help you develop the following three skills:

1. Learn to read history like an expert
2. Learn to analyze a book like a historian
3. Learn to write for an **audience of historians**
4. Choose an **appropriate voice** for this task
 - use effective structure for paper and paragraphs
 - consider word choice and style”

From Jamie's book review

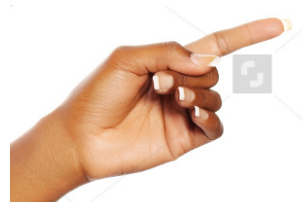
Fred Anderson's *The War That Made America* tells the intricate story of the war which would come to follow the confrontation on that spring morning in 1754. More importantly, Anderson uses the events of May 27, 1754 as a parable for his largest claim about the war. ... By equally involving the narrative of the Indians, Anderson's gripping prose creates a comprehensive account of the war in which, contrary to traditional depiction, no outcome is predetermined and even seemingly insignificant decisions compound to have resounding future implications. Anderson does acknowledge ...

From Jamie's book review

In sum, then, Anderson's approach is important because it reflects an apparent trend in the historiography of the French and Indian War. It appears that scholars publishing books on the war in the mid-2000s, notably William Fowler Jr. and Alfred Cave, follow similar progressions and develop similar arguments; they appear, that is, to abide by the premise that the dynamic of power in North America cannot be simplified to the two European powers. But Anderson's contribution is still unique because ...

Coates's analysis

“.. See here, she's showing awareness of a new trend in terms of which sources are used and why. She's picked up on that point, that Anderson's approach in source selection isn't 'traditional'”.



By equally involving the narrative of the Indians, Anderson's gripping prose creates a comprehensive account of the war in which, **contrary to traditional depiction**, no outcome is predetermined and even seemingly insignificant decisions compound to have resounding future implications.

Coates's views on voice (interview)

Z: Is it fair to say you want your students to write in a historian's voice, the voice of a history scholar?

C: That's fair. In fact I tell them that, and **that's because they're writing to an expert audience** – they're writing actually to grad students in history who will be using their book reviews for their own scholarship.

Peter (UM philosophy major)

“Reopening the Possibility of an Aristotelian Philosophy of Mind”

... Within this camp, there **seem** to be two types of interpretation. The first offers **what I will call** the “strong denial” that Aristotle has any philosophy of mind at all. According to this interpretation, Aristotle’s account is so muddled and confused that **we cannot plausibly attribute any position to Aristotle** on the issue, especially a position with any contemporary relevance. What Aristotle has instead is a discussion, or a set of musings, about *nous* that **we may safely disregard**. The second camp offers **what I will call** the “weak denial,” according to which Aristotle certainly has a concept of *nous*, but **we cannot treat *nous* simply as “mind.”** Merely to translate *nous* as mind would unintentionally import so many post-Cartesian assumptions into Aristotle’s thought that **we are safer to avoid treating his account as one of “mind” at all – at least, that is, as we understand “mind” now.**

Angela (UM political science major)

This is **the exact question that I addressed** in this study. Understanding the shift from one-party dominance to multi-party competition **will allow us** to have a more complete view of a country's current political circumstances. Dominant political parties have a **significant** effect on the political and social culture in a given country. If one party consistently runs the government and competition does not exist, then it will **certainly** affect both how the public perceives the government and also how the citizens interact with the government. Additionally, dominant political parties also have a **large** effect on the expression of democracy in any given country. For example, in Mexico's case, the one-party state lead to a more authoritarian democracy. So, if **we** can obtain a firm grasp on how and why a dominant country falls out of power, **we** can fully put the country's current political state into perspective.

QUESTIONS

Q3: What qualities of students' talk about texts (in light of their actual texts) showed signs of weakness?

Jon (UM English major)

“I’ve grown to be a capable writer in my English classes, but I guess I don’t really see this as connected to my growth as a writer. I don’t really regard those papers as ‘writing’ per se. **I wouldn’t define myself as a writer in terms of being able to write a paper and submit it for a grade. I have gotten more behind the writing that is meant to be read and I guess appreciated by actual readers.**”

Jon (UM English major)

(John Gower's *Vox Clamantis*)

By examining Gower's text and depiction of the rebels alongside what is arguably one of the most important events in the Bible, **we can understand better** what Gower was trying to do, but also just how greatly he misunderstood both his source material and the events he meant to relay. **Make no mistake**, the rebels were violent and sometimes ruthless, but never without good purpose. They **were not** evil in an absolute sense, **but rather** committed acts of destruction as a reaction to the wrongs perpetrated against them.

Jon (UM English major)

(John Gower's *Vox Clamantis*)

This comparison **may seem, at first glance** perfectly valid, and perhaps even convincing; after all, both Satan and those involved with the rising of 1381 were rebels acting out against the pugnacious estate and God, respectively. **However, this reading of the events of 1381 and of Satan's role in Christian theology fails to present** a complete portrait of either, which manages to not only discredit Gower's claims in *Vox Clamantis* but also creates an interpretative reversal that contradicts Gower's attempt to vilify the rebels through his usage of demonic imagery.

Some concluding thoughts

1. Audience awareness is facilitated by peer review, repurposing tasks, and carefully crafted prompts
2. Through such training, students can see that audiences
 - are not just individual readers, but imagined communities
 - are dynamic and multiple
 - shape or determine “good” language use (including tone, voice, etc.)
3. However, training in writing should also:
 - help students see how they are using language to **construct** audiences, not just **adapt** to audiences (‘audience invoked’ v. ‘audience addressed’).
 - further build students’ writing metalanguage, specifically for identifying their own uses of language that create audiences in texts

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Thank you!

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