

$f(\text{audience}) =$
infinity

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In this article, Donovan uses mathematical references and the investigation of several different genres to analyze what it is that appeals to an audience. She discusses how there are infinite yet many indeterminate ways to appeal to any audience. Many paths may be taken in order to appeal to a particular audience, much like when attempting to evaluate a math problem.

$f(\text{appeal to the whole audience}) = \text{DNE}^1$

Appealing to an entire audience is a nearly impossible endeavor, whether your audience is all United States citizens, the entire freshmen class of ISU, or a twenty-member kindergarten class in Seattle, Washington. The diversity among people in terms of culture, gender, age, and class can make the struggle even more difficult. It may seem simple to portray an idea to a broad audience, but engaging the entire public approaches the unachievable. In this article, I will explore the implications of attempting to attract a specific or general audience through writing. Through the discussion of a wide variety of genres and specific examples, I will illustrate the complications involved with attempting to appeal to any audience. I hope to show that although it's complicated, paying attention to audience is necessary for any writer.

$(x\text{-purpose})^2 + (y\text{-audience})^2 = \text{attraction}^{22}$

Gilbert K. Chesterton once wrote in *The Ethics of Elfland*, "Now, I have to put together a general position, and I pretend to no training in such things."²³

Under Chesterton's method of madness, he writes this piece by laying out his thoughts. His writing seems to be in order for him to *find* a message instead of writing to *send* a message to a particular audience. With the intention of searching for his message, he writes about finding a purpose; at least that is what some readers have understood his writing to be about. Like Chesterton, the struggle of any writer is to seek a purpose for writing and a method for approaching their audience. While Chesterton's approach to his audience was not clear, except that he obviously viewed himself as an integral part of his audience, many readers found his piece very intriguing, and he gained some popularity. Chesterton managed to successfully find and attract an audience with (seemingly) little attention to such matters, but this is rarely the case in most writing situations. Despite Chesterton's success not having done so, it's worthwhile for writers to think about how to engage a particular audience, especially because a message cannot be received without reaching an audience.

1,2,3,4,76,24,300,24,000,000...⁴

One way that some authors attempt to appeal to a diverse audience is to broaden their topic. Conveying an extremely broad message can certainly reach a greater audience, but sometimes that route may be less effective than appealing to a specific audience. A prime example of this tactic can be found in the genre of the fortune cookie. A common message someone might find in a fortune cookie is: "A book is in your future."⁵ No duh. I will probably open a book tonight to study and tomorrow to study again. According to a recent calculation, the literacy rate of the United States is 99% and rising.⁶ With this extremely high literacy rate, it is simple to generalize and speak of reading a book "in your future," as this will apply to most audience members. Another fortune reads, "Today's a good time to start something new." Although our lives are routine, we begin new tasks monthly, weekly, daily, even hourly. As these fortunes illustrate, it is easy to encompass the entire audience if you speak vaguely, but specificity is consequently diminished. Speaking from personal experience, whenever I have opened a fortune cookie, I have encountered a message with some sort of application to my life. That's why people get excited to read the contents of their fortune cookies. So, in the case of this genre, being vague and generalizing attracts audience members, which makes this strategically effective in capturing a large-scale audience.

$\sin(\text{specifics}) = \text{limited audience}$ ⁷

In contrast to a broad delivery, some writers specifically aim to reach a particular audience, which challenges their delivery. For instance, car

information on a website or at a dealership contains extremely specific information, which dealers have to provide due to liability reasons. For example, the information listed in Figure 1 (below) for a 2013 Chevrolet Avalanche is specific to the exact model and year of this car. The facts are delivered with the intentions of only reaching a limited group of people. Unfortunately, in the car world, that limited audience would be only those educated enough to understand what looks to me as a jumble of nonsense, which may also be the case for potential customers. At first glance, providing all this information that the customer may not understand might seem like a negative tactic, especially because the selection of a car is the result of the actions of the customer, and whether the information appeals to the customer determines if the customer will purchase the car or not. However, providing these specific numbers and a wide variety of statistics regarding the vehicle may actually provide the customer with the information they need to understand the product, once the statistics are explained to him or her by the salesman. Thus, after the customer understands the car synopsis, car dealers are no longer hindering the members of their audience with a jumble of unintelligible facts, but rather using the detailed information to their advantage in explaining the specs of the car to the customer. This process of providing specific information and educating customers is what leads to the success of car dealers and the genre of the vehicle specs sheet.

Specs and Dimensions			
Compression ratio:	9.90 to 1	Engine horsepower:	320hp @ 5,400RPM
Front headroom:	1,044mm (41.1")	Rear legroom:	993mm (39.1")
Payload:	634kg (1,397lbs)	Turning radius:	6.6m (21.5')
Exterior height:	1,946mm (76.6")	Curb weight:	2,632kg (5,803lbs)
Front shoulder room:	1,656mm (65.2")	Exterior body width:	2,009mm (79.1")
Wheelbase:	3,302mm (130.0")	Towing capacity:	2,268kg (5,000lbs)
Engine bore x stroke:	96.0mm x 91.9mm (3.78" x 3.62")	Rear hiproom:	1,582mm (62.3")
		Air Pollution Score (AP):	5
Greenhouse Gas Score (GG):	2	Rear headroom:	1,016mm (40.0")
Engine displacement:	5.3 L	Front legroom:	1,049mm (41.3")
Engine torque:	335 lb.-ft. @ 4,000RPM	Exterior length:	5,621mm (221.3")
GVWR:	3,266kg (7,200lbs)	Rear shoulder room:	1,656mm (65.2")
		Front hiproom:	1,532mm (60.3")

Figure 1. 2013 Chevrolet Avalanche synopsis.⁸

On the other hand, a movie synopsis is an instance when being too specific could be inappropriate to the genre. Revealing the perfect amount of information is vital when introducing a movie. If a critic reveals the resolution of the movie, readers might choose not to see the movie. Yet, the opposite may occur as well. If a critic is not specific enough and leaves the audience

questioning the main plot points, then the synopsis is ineffective. Consider reading a synopsis with a last line that reads, “Then Joey dies and the family escapes.” That’s definitely a plot buster. Being a consumer, I would no longer be interested in watching the film, and thus, the writer would have missed out on attracting a particular audience member—especially since I probably won’t be reading synopses by that particular author again.

Intended Message ≠ Received Message⁹

Unfortunately, sometimes an author attempts to convey a message, but the opposite message is received. For instance, many skeptics appear to have missed the intentions of Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain used this novel to attempt “to illustrate his own epiphany about American racism.”¹⁰ It seems that these intentions may have been misunderstood by critics who called him racist and disapproved of his infamous novel. In my opinion, Twain wrote his novel in order to give justice to the suffering individuals during this period of tension. Furthermore, I believe that Twain had virtually no intention of producing such a popular work of art. Yet, critics continue to scrutinize his masterpiece. Nonetheless, the amount of attention this novel has received, from both people who approve of it and those who don’t, has been massive, even if some of the audience members are misinterpreting Twain’s intentions.

Similarly, as Chuck Palahniuk wrote *Fight Club*, he envisioned a romance novel. When a room full of critics failed to recognize this aspect of his novel, Palahniuk realized that his intentions were not received as he expected. One critic exclaimed, “*Fight Club* is anything but a romance and sappy novel, but it’s writing in its finest.”¹¹ Although this novel is fairly recognized and popular, having the bulk of his audience miss his intentions may have left Palahniuk feeling bitter. Evaluating these examples of missed intentions brings up many thought-provoking questions: Should an author be disappointed if he or she creates a popular novel or movie that the audience views differently than it was intended? Do missed intentions have an effect on whether a particular message is received or not? Analyzing audience uptake may never reveal clear answers to these questions. While, for Palahniuk, audience members misunderstanding his intentions led to the popularity of his book (and the resulting movie), audience misinterpretation of an author’s intentions may also lead to the loss of an author’s popularity. This goes to show that authors are taking a risk when they introduce their writing to the public and that sometimes capturing an audience (or not) is a factor that authors have little control over.

Sarcasm > Seriousness when $f(\text{audience}) = \text{humorous}$ ¹²

The authors of some genres write with the intention to delight their audience with humor. This common tactic is employed by such authors as A. A. Milne. He wrote about disinterest in diary keeping in one of his pieces entitled, *The Diary Habit*.¹³ He writes, “I suppose this is the reason diaries are so rarely kept nowadays—that nothing ever happens to anybody.” Using this kind of humor, an author is sometimes able to attract audience members. Similarly, some authors use sarcasm to attempt to appeal to a particular audience. Sarcasm is a sharp, bitter, or cutting expression or remark, and it has been said that “sarcasm is the lowest form of wit, but the highest form of intelligence.”¹⁴ Sarcasm is used to catch the attention of the audience and draw them in. For example, in the graduation speech at my high school, the speaker began with the following: “I’d like to thank the internet, Google, Wikipedia, Microsoft Word, and copy and paste for helping me graduate . . .” These sarcastic remarks made the audience roar with laughter. Humorous remarks may not always relate to every member of an audience—like the teachers at my school, who showed their frustration at this student after all their efforts to teach the “correct” techniques of research—but they are typically highly accepted by the audience, depending on the genre. And especially because humor and sarcasm aren’t appropriate in every genre, using sarcasm doesn’t answer the ultimate audience question: how do you reach the broadest audience and still remain effective in your message?

[hit] or {miss}¹⁵

While I wrote this essay with the intention to appeal to my entire audience, I knew going in that it would be impossible. The impossibility is similar to “ $2+2=5$ ” in *1984* by George Orwell.¹⁶ (See, right there, I appealed only to those who are familiar with the novel and/or this particular reference.) The context of this ambiguous message in *1984* is that the government trained all the members of society to erase their past and to accept any government-sanctioned statement as true, even the notion that $2+2=5$. Being able to recognize such references may stem from different levels of familiarity with the source of the reference. Someone who is familiar with this particular *1984* reference may or may not have actually read the novel. And even distant knowledge of the reference may still allow the audience to connect to the parallel the writer is trying to make. What I am trying to illustrate, here, is that although including references like this one may only attract a small portion of the audience, once the reference is explained, the rest of the audience will probably be able to understand and benefit from the reference

as well. Does this tactic work to broaden my audience? Can I draw people in by making and explaining particular references throughout my piece, or am I just leaving some of my readers confused?

For example, some modern authors include pop culture references in their work, which are only effective when understood. Upon recognizing their target audience and the diversity therein, writers can evaluate and justify which references to make given the social characteristics of their audience. The authors of the television show “The Big Bang Theory,” for example, recognize their audience and make references accordingly. Such references include quotations from the movie *Mean Girls*, such as, “She doesn’t even go here!” and “There is a 30% chance that it’s already raining!” Such references are used because the target audience is presumed to be aware of such references, particularly because *Mean Girls* has a similar target audience as does the “Big Bang Theory.” However, because there are always going to be people unfamiliar with particular references, this action by authors and screenwriters is a risky endeavor—they’ll either have a hit or a miss. Some shows that rely heavily on pop culture references have been highly successful, such as “The Big Bang Theory” and “South Park,” yet others have failed to earn a reasonable profit.

$\lim_x (\text{appeal}) = \text{`17}$
 $\#\$$

One topic that has escaped discussion thus far is my use of the headings within this article. These headings all use math-related functions and symbols. With the addition of words instead of numerical values, I attempt to hint at the topics within that section. My reason for creating these headings was to establish a sort of “insider language” that would appeal to particular members of my audience—i.e. those who understand this mathematical jargon. This tactic is similar to how some writers use Latin words (or words from other languages) in their writing that are often understood only to those educated in Latin. Although it is probably somewhat familiar, one such reference is the phrase “*per se*.” The direct translation of this phrase is “by itself,” and it is used in English with this meaning. If a person came across a sentence using the term *per se*, such as, “I do not enjoy reading *per se*, but this novel caught my eye,” he or she may not understand the message without conducting further research. Thus, using a particular “insider language” may effectively attract a limited audience while leaving others out. It was my intention to experiment with this tactic in my article by using the “insider language” of mathematics— of course, I attempted to bring those unfamiliar with mathematics into the experience by creating footnotes to explain each of the headings.

Because of the use of these headings and the references to particular genres and pieces of writing throughout, I recognize that this article may only appeal to few. Yet, because I knew about the potential limit of my appeal going in, I attempted to alter wording and explanations so that even if a reference did not apply to one of my readers, he or she could still understand the point being made. Additionally, I paid special attention to my target audience and what they would find appealing. As an author, it is interesting and exciting to make these audience-related decisions, and it's even more fun to find out what works: which audience members you are able to attract and for which audience members your piece falls flat. You'll have to let me know what you think.

Endnotes

1. $f(\text{any value})$ means “the function of any value.” “DNE” means “does not exist.”
2. This is the equation for a circle centered at (purpose, audience) with a radius of attraction.
3. Kincaid, Zachry O. *The Narrative World of G.K. Chesterton Finding the Ethics in His Elfland*. Thesis. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2004. Print.
4. This is considered a series of numbers, steadily increasing in value; however, this particular list does not have a specific value connecting each number in the series.
5. “Fortune Cookie Quotes and Message Ideas, Like Ones in the Restaurant.” *Custom Fortune Cookies – Made Fresh. Write Your Own Message for Cheap*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Dec. 2012.
6. “Central Intelligence Agency.” *Welcome to the CIA Web Site*. N.p., n.d. Web. Mar. 2013. This information comes from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and classifies the definition of literacy as the “ability to read and write at a specific age.” For the United States, this age is 15. It also states that an agreed standard must be made within a given country since there is no universal definition or standard for literacy.
7. Sine (“sin”) is defined as the trigonometric function that is equal to the ratio of the side opposite a given angle (in a right triangle) to the hypotenuse.
8. “2013 Chevrolet Avalanche LTZ Black Diamond For Sale In Bloomington.” *Leman's Chevy City*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Oct. 2013.

9. The symbol " \neq " is defined as the "does not equal" symbol. Therefore, the subtitle reads: the intended message does not equal the received message.
10. Hotchkiss, Craig. "Rewriting Huckleberry Finn Twists Twain's Intentions." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 07 Jan. 2011. Web. 01 Dec. 2012.
11. "Fight Club." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d. Web. Mar. 2013.
12. The symbol " $>$ " is defined as the "greater than" symbol.
13. Milne, A. A. "The Diary Habit." *A. A. Milne's Essay*. N.p., n.d. Web. 2013.
14. "Sarcasm." *Dictionary.com*. Dictionary.com, n.d. Web. Mar. 2013.
15. "[]" and "[]" are denoted as square brackets. "{ }" and "{ }" are denoted as braces.
16. Orwell, George. *1984*. Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1997. Print.
17. $\lim_{x \rightarrow \infty}$ denotes the limit function. The " ∞ " symbol means infinity. Therefore, this subtitle reads: the limit of appeal as x approaches infinity equals infinity.



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