



Audience Reception:

Author's Note: I'm trying my best not to sound like *that* singer, who lives, breathes, and sleeps singing and wants everyone to know. We've all seen this person. Please bear with me.

It's difficult to hear your voice when you're the one singing. You may think you sound like Beyoncé in your head, but to anyone else you sound like one of those poor, naïve souls who auditions on *American Idol* and inevitably faces rejection. I think the same could be said about writing: You can't read your own words through the eyes of an outsider. You may mean one thing, and it could make perfectly clear sense in your head, but it could be incomprehensible to virtually anyone reading. Audience awareness is a concept that is vital to both areas. Because of this, there are many aspects to be aware of in singing: breathing, posture, shape of mouth, facial expression, and register. Though they seem trivial, each of these components directly affects the tone, overall vocal sound, and resonance. In writing, these factors can equate to diction, topic sentences, evidence, and general coherence. This semester, I have had to analyze the technicalities of both writing and singing to increase my audience awareness.

The foundations of singing rest on breathing. Without proper breathing technique, the voice can become strained and damaged over time; see Mariah Carey and Idina Menzel's live performances for proof of this. The healthy method involves using the diaphragm, instead of the throat to breathe. This allows for more control, support, and projection, and can even increase the vocal range of a singer. Singing with the diaphragm opens the throat to create a sound that has a ringing quality. It will prosper a vibrato that is not forced or tense in any way. However, it is a process to learn, since most people don't use their diaphragm in their daily life, other than to cough and sneeze. For me, it has taken a good amount of time to become accustomed to this method of breathing.

In writing, using proper evidence and proof acts as a support mechanism for a claim. Something I really struggled with in writing before English 1102 was providing sufficient evidence for my argument, such as quotes and specific references. My arguments were decently analytical, but for a literary argument to communicate a point well, there needs to be a good amount of details to illustrate this, rather than just making groundless claims. In my second paper, my claim was that "The Lottery" received an unprecedented outcry from a violated American public," but I didn't illustrate this in any way. I assumed the audience would understand. I also wrote "This nameless village's indifference to their own savagery helps to exacerbate the audience's reaction," and my professor noted that I didn't have a quote to prove this. What was problematic was that this was not an isolated occurrence throughout this paper and previous papers. For my third paper, I made sure I had more than enough examples by listing them in my outline as my first act of planning. Without proper support, the writer is severely limited, and eventually loses credibility in the eyes of a reader.

Another important factor in singing is the shape of the mouth. When receiving air, it is important to receive as much air as possible. By opening your mouth wider than is comfortable, you are



able to increase your capacity for breath. In addition, it's important to smile while singing, as a beginner, to learn to utilize the resonance and space in your mouth and head. Smiling causes the cheekbones to rise, and creates a larger space for resonance. It shapes the sound the voice produces, often giving it a brighter and more colorful tone.

Likewise, diction is central to influencing how the reader interprets and validates your argument. I had never been too concerned with diction before this class. I am fairly confident in my ability to find petty spelling or grammatical errors; however, there were times when I failed to explicate or give context to my reader, which creates confusion. In my third paper, my professor had marked this sentence: "Furthermore, as she enters human society, she desires to people watch at a busy intersection." He noted that the diction was awkward, and looking back, I realize that it is. At the time, however, I did not think anything of it. Now, to prevent this, I try reading my work aloud before I turn it in, to prevent these incidences from occurring. This is the closest I can get to a true outside perspective. When diction is properly utilized, it gives the writer a sense of authority and intelligence. Diction also incorporates a writer's sense of style. Word choice dictates the tone and voice of the writing, like formal versus colloquial or humorous versus serious.

One morning during lessons, I found myself doing squats and arm circles, while watching myself in a mirror. My instructor noted that I had a tendency to stiffen my shoulders and hips while singing. It was not the most graceful exercise, but sure enough, the sound quality had improved after I loosened up. Proper posture is a trait all singers should practice. Posture can improve or downgrade a singer's performance. Standing up straight with your head raised and shoulders lowered, and body free of tension will optimize the vocal quality by opening the throat and allowing more room for air. When slouching, it is more difficult to receive the maximum amount of breath.

Structural support in writing follows the same logic. To optimize a literary argument, some paragraph structure should exist. This usually involves a topic sentence followed by an analysis, evidence, and a conclusion. For me, topic sentences and conclusions were areas I needed to work on. I never liked using a formal structure to my paragraphs because it required more work than I was used to in high school. I remember this semester, we did an activity in our outline where we needed to include a topic sentence for every paragraph. As I was writing them, I struggled because I noticed my paragraphs couldn't be contained in a single topic sentence. It was then that I realized I had a tendency to stray off topic. Topic sentences have aided in narrowing the focus of each of my paragraphs and consolidating my paragraph structure.

Audience awareness is key to allowing a sense of trust between the creator and the audience. Each of the technicalities I have discussed in both writing and singing has a role in audience awareness. They create the ethos of the individual. When audience awareness is taken into consideration and these technicalities are mastered, the audience doesn't even seem to notice them, which is a little frustrating because it feels like all your hard work goes partly unnoticed. Everything just comes together in such a



natural way that the audience doesn't have to worry about the writer or performer making mistakes; they just get drawn into their world.

All of these details may seem overwhelming at first. There were times when my vocal instructor stopped me before I even got a sound out of my mouth, and I was so frustrated because I kept succumbing to my bad habits. Taking these elements piece by piece and working with each of them individually over a good amount of time will result in steady improvement. I am a very result-oriented person, so discovering my faults and bad habits, and *gradually* learning to overcome them has been difficult. I have learned to take time and practice breathing, posture, and mouth shape outside of my lessons. Similarly, I know to take more time with my writing to ensure it comes across as comprehensible to my audience. Perhaps the most difficult is making these elements internalized. I will admit that I have not internalized every rule of singing and writing; I'm still learning. Becoming mindful of my habits has allowed me to increase my awareness of my audience, and to become more thoughtful as a young writer and singer.