Teaching Case

Using Case-Method Pedagogy to Facilitate Audience Awareness

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***Abstract*—Introduction:** *Technical and professional communication (TPC) instructors value audience awareness, using peer- and client-based projects to facilitate it. We explore how students' audience awareness is facilitated by the case method, which presents students with a professional communication task within a workplace scenario.* **Situating the case:** *Case-method research suggests including a detailed audience and situation, multiple genres, and multimedia. Few studies have explored how case materials facilitate students' audience awareness.* **About the case:** *A 12-week case that was consistent with case-method research asked students to respond to an engineering firm's internal problem with a proposal and report.* **How the case was studied:** *Students from two sections of a genre-based course completed reflections about their audience awareness after the proposal and report. We qualitatively analyzed 51 reflections.* **Results/discussion:** *Students stated they could understand the facts about their primary audience but couldn't identify secondary and tertiary audiences. Students stated they could identify audience needs, but they disagreed about the amount of detail to understand those needs. Also, students stated they could respond to the audience using appropriate evidence and writing style.* **Conclusions:** *When using the case method, instructors should know that students may need varying levels of detail to interpret their audience's needs. Also, including data and conflicting needs gives students opportunities to make strategic decisions about content.*

Index Terms*—Audience awareness, case-method, pedagogy, report and proposal writing.*

Technical and professional communication (TPC) scholars agree that audience awareness is important [1]–[10]. To teach this awareness, TPC scholarship recommends various pedagogical methods, including the case method. Researchers argue that when students respond to cases they interpret and respond to the audiences presented [11], [12]. However, little research details how students consider these audiences. Ford [13] found through talk-aloud protocols that students mentioned awareness of audiences in an engineering case. Rozumalski and Graves [14] found that business students responding to cases ranked audience as more important than did students responding to traditional assignments.

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However, no study specifically detailed students' audience awareness. Consequently, this paper provides insight into how students interpret and respond to the audience in a case developed for a report and proposal writing course. The following questions guided this teaching case:

RQ1. What do students say about how case materials helped them to *interpret* their audience?

RQ2. What do students say about how case materials helped them to *respond* in writing to their audience?

RQ3. What do students say about the effectiveness of case materials in helping them interpret and respond to their audience?

After administering a 12-week case in two sections of the course, we analyzed students' reflections that accompanied proposal and report assignments to determine which case materials students found effective in helping them interpret and respond to the audience.

We first situate the teaching case in research on audience-awareness and case-method pedagogy before detailing the teaching case and describing our methods for studying it. We then provide results and implications.

Practitioner Takeaway

- Case-method research suggests including a detailed audience and situation, multiple genres, and multimedia, but few studies have explored how case materials facilitate students' audience awareness
- The authors asked students to respond to an engineering firm's internal problem with a proposal and report. Students completed reflections about their audience awareness, and the authors qualitatively analyzed 51 reflections
- Students said that they could understand the facts about their primary audience but couldn't identify secondary and tertiary audiences, could identify audience needs but disagreed about the amount of detail to understand those needs, and could respond to the audience using appropriate evidence and writing style.

Situating the Case

When reviewing literature, we searched for research in TPC journals using terms including *audience awareness, audience analysis, reader analysis, user analysis,* and *case method*. Case-method pedagogy originated in business, so we review some business research but focus primarily on TPC research.

Definition of Audience Awareness First, we distinguish audience awareness from audience analysis. TPC research suggests that audience awareness is knowledge based on interpretation of contextual information that leads a technical or professional communicator to respond accordingly. Particularly, Dobrin describes audience awareness as a "*sense of audience*" [3, p. 103, emphasis in original], a sense gained from audience analysis (p. 108). Hovde defines audience awareness using three concepts: building images, audience, and organizational contexts [4, p. 396]. Building images involves the writer "creating mental constructs of audience"; audience refers to "the writers' conceptions of the users" while in the process of writing (p. 396); and organizational contexts refers to "the culture, traditions, and attitudes that provide constraints and resources for the writers' work" (p. 396). With the context-specific decisions that writers make when writing (p. 396), writers anticipate the best way to respond to their audiences, "relying in large part upon their own vision of their readers, which they create" [15, p. 158]. Thus, audience awareness is a mental sense of the audience instantiated as the author writes or designs.

Audience analysis is the process of *developing* that mental sense using various heuristics and research methods. Albers [1], Blakeslee [2], Dobrin [3], Ross [8], Schriver [9], Spilka [10], Turns and Wagner [16], and Warren [17] developed heuristics for analyzing audiences, such as creating written or graphical representations of an audience's needs, values, and goals. Developing representations requires research conducted with audiences or users, or through examining artifacts. To conduct user research, one can use online surveys [16], in-person interviews [8], paper prototyping [18], site visits [19], personas, and usability testing [20] among others. To develop personas, for example, professionals conduct observations, surveys, interviews, and demographic research [20]–[22]. However, users are not always accessible [2], so one can synthesize audience information from artifacts such as discussion boards, call logs, marketing content, training content, and internet logs [2, p. 221], [16]. Thus, TPC instructors can require students to utilize heuristics or conduct research of users and artifacts.

TPC research suggests that differences exist between audience analysis and audience awareness. Friess found that professional designers [20], [21] and students [23] analyzed their audiences to develop personas, yet they hardly used the analysis in the design process. This finding suggests that audience analysis (conducting research about an audience or user) is distinct from audience awareness (maintaining the mental sense of that audience or user). This distinction is manifest through a study of TPC course descriptions, which revealed separate competencies: "ability to analyze users' needs" and "ability to apply audience analysis to the design and writing of documents"—both valued by technical communication managers [24, p. 324]. This difference clarifies this article's scope: developing a mental sense of audience (audience analysis) is valuable for research and practice, but we focused on gauging how the case method creates a context for students to have a mental sense of audience (audience awareness).

TPC instructors differ in achieving this pedagogical aim, using peer-to-peer interaction, client-based projects, and case-method projects.

Peer- and Client-Based Projects Pedagogical approaches involving real audiences include peer-to-peer interaction and client-based projects. Peer interaction is a pedagogical method that places classroom or external peers in the audience role, an approach that can increase audience awareness because students receive reactions to their writing from actual readers [25]–[28]. While such an approach does not substitute for the intended, professional audience that TPC instructors want their students to consider [29, p. 141], [11, p. 10], [3, p. 106], Ward demonstrated that peer interaction can serve as “a more gradual ascent” toward working with professional audiences [28, p. 63]. Using cross-classroom collaboration, Ward showed how student essays indicated that students felt “the presence of an audience” (p. 78). He argued that a spectrum exists from traditional learning with the instructor as audience, to peer review with the peer as audience, and finally to client-based projects with an external professional as audience. He argued that cross-classroom collaboration, where external peers are the audience, bridges the gap between situations on each end of the spectrum. Notably, Ward does not mention the case method in this spectrum, suggesting that research is needed to explore how students interpret and respond to an external professional in cases.

In addition to peer interaction, TPC instructors use client-based projects to develop audience awareness. For example, students could write proposals to actual sponsors on behalf of nonprofits. Instructors value working with real audiences because, among other benefits, it heightens audience awareness in students [30], helps instructors stay in touch with industry professionals [31], fosters multidisciplinarity [32], and prepares students for employment [33]. Ultimately, client-based projects offer contexts for students to conduct audience analysis to help students acquire a mental sense of professional audiences.

Working with professional audiences involves its own challenges, however, because client-based projects may not fit within the course length, and the need to find and work with clients can be stressful. Challenges include assessment [34], group work [35], and student–client interactions [30], [36]–[38]. Instructors can complicate these interactions by focusing more on organizing projects than on preparing students for client work [32]. They can prepare students by pairing those with more client experience with students with less experience [32], helping students understand their audience’s organizational contexts [37], and teaching interpersonal skills [38]. Preparing students for client interaction seems especially important given the benefits that students may forfeit if difficulties undermine a project.

Case Method Another approach is case-method projects. Although researched less thoroughly in TPC, researchers in other disciplines have discussed their advantages and disadvantages. Cases can engage students and instructors, provide students an opportunity to learn through workplace scenarios, facilitate students’ thinking about professional issues, and foster an interactive classroom [39, pp. 6–7]. However, successful cases can hinge upon teaching abilities and the availability of discipline-specific cases, resources to develop or understand cases, and case-writing standards [40]. We found only two studies on the role of audience awareness in case-method pedagogy [13], [14]. Rozumalski and Graves [14] demonstrated that detailed cases better facilitate audience awareness than less-detailed cases, and Ford [13] found that students consider their audience when responding to cases.

Because we wanted to more specifically understand our students’ experiences with case-method pedagogy, we used the case-method project. The following sections detail how the case method can facilitate the context and audience for students to develop audience awareness.

Context: Case-method projects involve students responding to a fictional but realistic workplace scenario, though it is only an approximation of a workplace [41]. Beginning in business education [42], the case method typically presents “a written description of a realistic situation in which students are confronted with a rhetorical problem that contains appropriate complexity, emphasizes composition as problem solving, and allows for divergent or open-ended solutions” [14, p. 80]. Cases provide students “open-ended” and “interpretive” freedoms to respond to TPC problems [43, pp. 181–182], [12].

To convey a realistic context, the research suggests that cases should reflect standard, day-to-day workplace situations rather than rare crises. Dorn [44] analyzed cases to compare them to writing situations reported by 25 employees. She argued for cases that prompt "more mundane rhetorical situations" over "exceptional rhetorical situations" (p. 42). However, cases should not be simple or unrealistic. For cases to get at the "heart of the substantive writer-reader relationship," they must include information about interpersonal issues, organizational personnel, organizational hierarchy, and other organizational details [45, p. 35]. Contextual information should thus be detailed and realistic.

Case media can facilitate contextual information. Saunders administered an "in basket" technique, enabling students "to experience the flow of communication across distinct discourse communities" [46, pp. 87–88]. He avoided the "narrative structure" of traditional case materials and provided written documents and communications between people in his case, asking students to interpret the documents, piece together the situation, and provide a response. Saunders [46] re-created his case so students could explore data and information in email communications within a web-based environment. The change seemed to strengthen "the illusion that each learner was intimately tied to the context of the events" (p. 92), providing workplace realism to enhance students' learning. Similarly, Russell and Fisher [47] showed how online, "multimedia case studies" with interconnecting genres can enable students to transfer knowledge because they reflect workplace genre systems. Thus, we wanted our case-method materials to involve various genres and media.

Audience: The case-method project involves students responding to fictional but realistic audiences. Research suggests that detailed case materials help students develop audience awareness. Rozumalski and Graves [14] compared students' survey results after completing three kinds of case assignments: a two-sentence prompt; a 3- to 4-paragraph summary of the audience, context, and writer's role with background circumstances; and a highly detailed, narrative case including extensive background on the company and the writer, past correspondence with the audience, data, and other components. They found that students ranked their sense of audience and context higher in the longest case than in the others, concluding that elaborated case materials "forced thinking and writing processes that required students to consider audience, context, writer role, and writing impact" (p. 91). Thus, we wanted to include enough details to enable students to heighten their audience awareness.

One case-method approach is the "unified case method," which asks students to produce communication products in response to the same fictional world [48]. We found that this "unified case method" fit our course purposes. As we taught two major genres of TPC (reports and proposals), students could respond to one audience for both genres, and this process could facilitate a proposal-report timeline discussed by Freed and Roberts [49], detailed in the next section. This method facilitated our goal for students to interpret and respond effectively to "an audience of people with personalities, habits, and political alliances" [11, p. 11]. We hoped that students' considering and responding to such an audience would provide practice for the workplace.

About the Case

In our course, we hoped that among other course outcomes, students would be able to

- Relate with audiences by analyzing and communicating their needs, values, and attitudes
- Analyze information and present it persuasively and effectively

Communicated within both outcomes were audience-awareness skills: interpreting and responding to audiences, including secondary and tertiary audiences. As the second outcome suggests, students need information about an audience and situation to facilitate their interpreting and responding, information—such as data—that when analyzed, contains ideas that they can communicate. We also agreed with arguments that we should help students develop data literacies [50], [51].

Furthermore, as our course syllabus stated, the course existed to teach students about

> the theory and practice of preparing and analyzing reports and proposals intended for businesses, governmental agencies, and/or private and corporate foundations.

As a course focused on two TPC genres, it required students to learn generic features of both and relate features to specific audiences. We had students read Freed and Roberts' 1989 article [49], which discusses how TPC textbooks tend to blur the report and proposal genres. Despite the article's age, our experience suggests that Freed and Roberts' observation is still valid, and we found the way that they position the two genres to be helpful.

> When is a proposal a report? Despite the claims of the textbooks, the answer to that question is, quite simply, never . . . , though the two genres do indeed share important characteristics . . . . The proposal analyzes a problem and then proposes an approach for solving it . . . . At the study's conclusion, another document—the recommendation report—will be written . . . .The lines of demarcation separating the proposal from the recommendation report are the beginning and end of the study (pp. 322–323).

Thus, we wanted students to develop generic awareness of these two genres. We also chose Johnson-Sheehan's *Writing Proposals* [52] for the textbook because it

- Introduces the topic of proposal writing
- Discusses a heuristic for situation and audience analysis that involves students analyzing multiple types of audiences, including primary ("decision makers"), secondary ("advisors"), and tertiary ("evaluators") readers (p. 37)
- Discusses each section of the genre and related elements of professional documents, including writing style, design, graphics, and front and back matter
- Facilitated breaking the course into units

We did not have a textbook for report writing because we could not find a text that mirrored Johnson-Sheehan's structure, a consistency that would benefit students. However, we consulted Johnson-Sheehan's report-writing chapters in *Technical Communication Today* [53] when developing lectures as a way to supplement the principles introduced by his proposal-writing text.

We asked students to respond to a case that we created. Though no criteria exist for developing TPC case materials, we tried to be consistent with existing research. The case materials we created included a workplace audience and situation, elaborate detail, and various genres and media. Case materials gave students a narrative framework and required students to interpret artifacts to understand situational and audience factors, which mirrors Saunders' in-basket technique [46].

First, students responded to a fictional request for proposals (RFP) that described fictional engineering firm Bauer and Rourke's request for a consultant to investigate a problem in its sales department (see Fig. 1). With the RFP, students received a video interview, a voicemail, a company website (www.bauerandrourke.wordpress.com), and quantitative data describing the company's engineering projects. (See Appendices A and B in the supplementary downloadable materials.) The video interview with the firm's point of contact included details about the audience's situation, needs, and values. The contact's voicemail added detail about culture and values. The firm's website included their mission and values, location, and previous projects. Project data reinforced the audience's situation described in the RFP and interview. Students were to propose a method for investigating the nature, scope, and severity of the problem, consistent with Freed and Roberts' "analytic proposal" type [49, p. 326]. These case materials prompted the proposal, which students considered through class discussion and draft workshops for six weeks.

Upon completing the proposal, students received a project update that informed them of their accepted proposal and the need to produce a report of their investigation. (See Appendix C in the supplementary downloadable materials.) They received data as if they had carried out their proposed study. The data included employee-interview transcripts and climate-survey results. (See Appendices D–F in the supplementary downloadable materials.) The survey involved closed-ended questions (for quantitative data analysis) and open-ended questions (for qualitative data analysis). These case materials prompted the report, which students considered through class discussion and draft workshops for five weeks.

To facilitate the proposal and report writing units, we used this three-day-a-week structure.

- *Day 1: Topic Introduction.* Before class, students watched a lecture video and read a chapter on the topic. In class, students analyzed proposals or reports for strengths and weaknesses through group discussion.
- *Day 2: Content Invention.* Before class, students had no preparation. In class, students invented content through a heuristic and group discussion.
- *Day 3: Peer Review.* Before class, students posted a draft of a proposal or report section. In class, students provided written and oral feedback on drafts.

We created case materials using Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word, a high-definition camera borrowed from our department, a free account on WordPress, and Apple's GarageBand and iMovie, costing no

Request for Proposals

Solicitation Number: PD-06-2899
Posted Date: August 25, 2014
Response Due Date: October 13, 2014
Point of Contact: Kelly Van Loude, Consultant Contracting Officer, 555-555-5555

Bauer and Rourke, once a small civil engineering consulting firm, has grown to employ nearly one hundred professional staff, mostly in the engineering and business and financial departments.

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers' (ASCE's) 2011 report, a significant amount of U.S. infrastructure needs rehabilitation. The report's exceptionally poor ratings encouraged an increase in infrastructure projects. Infrastructure rehabilitation, which is the focus of Bauer and Rourke's work, was thus in high demand in 2012. As a result, the project demand increased the workload for Bauer and Rourke's employees. To help carry the heavy project load, the company's professional staff has grown even more (in engineering to business administration), but Bauer and Rourkes's rapid growth did not lead to an increase in support staff or equipment.

While past consultants have helped correct this discrepancy in the engineering and business and financial departments, Bauer and Rourke is still facing inefficiencies in its sales department, which are causing a loss in project contracts. While one simple solution would be to buy new equipment and to hire new support staff for the department, Bauer and Rourke will move its headquarters to a new facility in early 2015, and the company does not want to make additional investments during this time, including support staff and equipment. Additionally, project demand has decreased slightly since the 2012 boost from the 2011 ASCE report. Overall, project contract numbers are not as exceptional as they were in 2011 and 2012.

Given that situation, another solution might be to terminate some of the sales associates to mirror this demand decrease, but market projections show that throughout 2015, demand may increase again. Moreover, Bauer and Rourke has been since its foundation a family-oriented company that prides itself in caring for its employees and weighing terminations sensitively.

As a demonstration of that sensitivity, Bauer and Rourke thought that the recent push to hold its edge over its competitors had caused the sales department the inefficiency, and so it surveyed the department and found that perhaps as a result of this push to attract more bids for projects, several sales employees felt they were performing duties outside of their job descriptions, creating low morale.

Bauer and Rourke has requested proposals from an organization consulting firm to study the situation in the sales department, the results of which will help Bauer and Rourke to solve the current situation in that department. Bauer and Rourke's leadership will evaluate the proposals.

Fig. 1. RFP for the case.

TABLE I
SUMMARY OF THE TEACHING SOLUTION

Budget	Free, pending software and hardware access
Time	Approximately 10 hours
Skills It Promotes	Audience Analysis Information Analysis and Presentation Data Analysis and Presentation Genre Awareness (Proposals and Reports)
Software Used to Create It	MS Word and Excel for case narrative and data HD Camera for interviews GarageBand for audio editing iMovie for video editing Wordpress.com for the website

money and taking approximately 10 h of work, a feat feasible in a typical course preparation. Table I summarizes our teaching solution.

HOW THE CASE WAS STUDIED

This section details how we set up our study to answer the research questions.

Participants In the fall 2014 semester at a large, Midwestern, four-year university, we taught two face-to-face sections of a report and proposal writing course. Students came from engineering, human sciences, physical and biological sciences, humanities, and business because the course provided a service to various majors. Thus, our recruiting of participants was not restricted to one academic discipline. After receiving Institutional Review Board approval from the university, we recruited students as participants. We sought consent to use their post-assignment reflections for research. We each recruited students from the other's section to avoid recruiting our own students. We each knew the identity of consenting participants from the other's section only. In total, we collected two reflections from each of the 26 consenting students. One student completed only the proposal reflection questionnaire, resulting in 51 reflections rather than 52.

Data Gathering Once after proposals were submitted and again after reports were submitted, students completed an electronic questionnaire using Qualtrics (see Appendix D in the supplementary downloadable materials), which served as post-assignment reflections meant to prompt students to articulate how they interpreted and responded to their audience. The questions prompted students to identify who the audience was, how they identified the audience, what difficulties they faced in identifying the audience, and how they adapted their communication for the audience. These open-ended questions enabled students to describe fully their process of interpreting and responding to the audience.

Data Analysis We analyzed and categorized the students' responses, following attribute, process, and axial coding steps identified by Saldana [54].

In first-cycle coding, the "initial coding of data," [54, p. 45], we ensured the data attributes' accuracy. Attribute coding enabled us to check the data's "basic descriptive information" [54, p. 55]. Attribute codes were the metadata associated with the responses (e.g., unique identifier and reflection question).

During first-cycle coding, we also coded for processes. Process coding "uses gerunds ('-ing' words) exclusively to connote action in the data" [54, p. 77] that captured when students stated that they were interpreting or responding to the audience. This coding tracked the goals that students stated that they had as they wrote. For example, one student wrote, "The case did a great job of making clear not only what Bauer and Rourke's needs were, but also showing some of the company's personality (such as being a family-friendly company)," which we coded as interpreting the audience's value for employees.

To ensure a level of reliability, we each coded a sample of 10% of the responses to determine "interpretive convergence" between us through intensive group discussion and consensus about what we saw in the data [54, pp. 27–28]. After coming to a consensus, we divided and individually coded the remainder of the data. Through first-cycle process coding, we observed numerous processes in the responses, such as the students' interpreting the audience's value of their budget and the students' responding to the audience with credibility.

We moved to second-cycle coding, which served as a way "of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through First Cycle methods" [54, p. 149]. We streamlined first-cycle codes by identifying connections between them, a process that Saldana calls "axial coding" [54, p. 159]. Again, using intense discussion, we determined five categories that identified students both interpreting and responding (see Table II).

We used "magnitude coding" to identify students communicating a positive or negative experience in their attempts to interpret or respond to the audience. This supplemental code identified "evaluative content" [54, p. 58], enabling us to determine whether the case method was more or less effective in enabling audience awareness.

Results and Discussion

We now identify the ways that students reported interpreting and responding to their audience throughout their experience with this case method. Because we did not gather the gender of the participants, we report responses by alternating feminine and masculine pronouns. We made minor editorial changes to students' responses to improve readability.

What Students Said Helped Them to Interpret the Audience Students reported their experiences interpreting their audience in two main categories:

1. Demographics
2. Needs and values

Students reported specific aspects of the case that helped them and hindered them when interpreting information.

Success in Identifying Demographics: Students reported that they could successfully identify the demographics, or basic facts, about their audience, who were employees of the fictional engineering

TABLE II
CODING CATEGORIES FOR STUDENT REFLECTIONS

Coding Categories	Definition
Interpreting	
Demographics	The basic facts about the audience (e.g., identity, mission, organizational structure)
Needs and Values	The audience's requirements or standards and the audience's cultural expectations
Responding	
Credibility	The perception that the audience has about the writer
Evidence	The way that the writer presents data and justifies claims
Propriety	The tone and style that the writer employs

firm called Bauer and Rourke. Students said that they understood the current situation of the company and that the case material helped them identify who they were writing to. One student stated that she could see this information in the RFP.

> I think this proposal has many people as its audience, but the primary audience is Kelly Van Loude and the decision-makers. What helped me understand this is the RFP. This gave us information about who the key contact person would be, which is Kelly Van Loude. It gave us information about issues going on in Bauer and Rourke, and other information like when they need the proposal by.

The RFP's header information provided Kelly Van Loude as the point of contact, whom this student accurately interpreted to be the primary audience. Another student described that he could identify problems that the company was facing, problems detailed in the RFP and interview.

> The information allowed me to see what kinds of issues were occurring in the sales department and that the management was reaching out for help. The management of Bauer and Rourke are the ones who want to bring the company back up.

Using the RFP, the website, and the voicemail from the point of contact, another student described how she could identify the company's mission and its decision-makers.

> I think having the RFP and the information online really helped me understand who the audience was. We had the voicemail online that could help us, as well as information about the company's mission statement and values. By being provided those tools I could get a better understanding of the company and find out who would typically be involved in the decision-making team.

Another student noted that the interview and voicemail, website, RFP, and other elements helped to realistically build up the audience in one coherent image.

> Bauer and Rourke is built up as a real company with real people. If you treat this assignment with the state of mind that everything is real, everything comes together to form an image of who Bauer and Rourke is and defines the audience.

Students thus used the multimedia case materials, specifically the RFP, the website, and the voicemail, to identify the audience's current situation, organizational information, and organizational structure.

Difficulty in Identifying Demographics: Alternatively, students reported that the level of detail in the case materials gave them difficulty in identifying demographic information. For example, a student noted that the case left her unsure about the organizational hierarchy and the type of audience she was writing to, suggesting that additional resources should have been included beyond the one video interview with the point of contact.

> Although we were provided with resources to understand the problem at hand, the resources were short and vague, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly what type of audience we were writing for. The interview was helpful, but it would have been nice to have a few more—such as an interview from lower staff at Bauer and Rourke.

Another example suggests that the interview could have been more concrete, as this student noted that its vagueness left him unsure about the audience's situation.

> I think that [the case materials] didn't seem very helpful especially since the parts of the interview with the point of contact seemed very vague. That might be how the real world treats RFP's but I wasn't quite sure whether I was depicting the right situation in my proposal because of it.

Students also desired more detail about secondary audiences. The RFP stated the name of the point of contact, but it stated only that the "leadership" of Bauer and Rourke would be evaluating the proposal. Students noted the need for more detail about who exactly comprised the leadership of the company.

> The RFP clearly stated the key contact, but I also had to think about who else could read this proposal. This was difficult because I didn't know exactly what kind of company Bauer and Rourke was, thus who would be employed there that could read the proposal. It was difficult to take the time to think who would be the CEO and then think about each person under the CEO.

Students pinpointed their lack of familiarity with the company as a reason for their difficulty in identifying secondary and tertiary audiences.

> I struggled some with understanding the secondary and tertiary readers and their roles, especially in the B&R case because it is fictional. So it was difficult for me to make up who might be reading the report beyond those that we present it to without being well versed with the company or being able to speak to a representative directly.

These findings suggest that students preferred more concrete detail in the cases, especially in relation to the various audiences. Students' responses indicated that a better understanding of and clarity concerning the fictional company's organizational context could have helped them better identify audiences. Previous results in this study indicate that other students were comfortable with the level of detail. Thus, students did not agree on levels of detail for identifying demographic information, suggesting that students have varying needs for detail about audience and context.

Success in Identifying Needs and Values: Students reported that by using the multimedia in the case, they could identify their audience's needs and values. For example, a student noted that he identified the needs of the audience in the RFP and the company website.

> The background information for the company, the request for proposals, etc., as well as the example proposals provided helped me understand who the audience was and what they might be looking for.

Another student reported that the voicemail and interview helped her to "get an idea of what the leadership at Bauer and Rourke was looking for and who they were."

Students also reported that they could identify the values of the company, with a student describing values from the RFP as the company's "personality."

> The case did a great job of making clear not only what Bauer and Rourke's needs were, but also showing some of the company's personality (such as being a family-friendly company).

Another student described how he could see in the RFP both company values and needs.

> It [the RFP] showed me that this was primarily a drive to restore the company's profits, and that they were "family oriented." And other stuff, save money, don't cut people, show that it's not people that are problems, it's the situation.

The data given to the students for the report prompted them to think about recommendations. It included interview and questionnaire data generated by employees that this student used to consider how her recommendations would influence other stakeholders in the company beyond primary readers.

> Having that information made me be able to see the company through an employee's eye and not

> someone's who is higher up in the company or the CEO. I knew that I was most likely writing for people higher in the company, but I could always keep in mind the employees who filled out the questionnaire or allowed us to interview them.

Another student indicated that the RFP helped him consider other readers' concerns.

> The case data made it evident who the primary audience would be as I said above. It also gave some insight into the secondary readers (namely financial experts) as there was a lot of discussion about not having the funds to hire more staff or purchase new equipment so we knew that, at some point, a member of the financial team would be checking through to make sure our ideas are reasonable from a costs standpoint.

Students were thus able to identify needs and values as they were distributed across the various case materials, including the RFP, voicemail, website, and data.

Difficulty in Identifying Needs and Values: Alternatively, other students stated that case materials could be clearer in presenting company needs. For example, a student noted her challenge of writing for an audience with unclear needs.

> They weren't very clear on what they wanted so trying to write the proposal for this audience had its challenges. There seemed to be a lot of guessing or making things up throughout the proposal because the information wasn't given or the audience wasn't specific as to what they wanted.

Another student, however, praised areas of ambiguity in the case's RFP because "[i]t was vague enough that we had to come up with some of our own ideas, but also detailed enough that it gave us direction."

The challenge may have come from interpreting conflicting needs in the case, with a student concluding that the challenges faced with these conflicting needs may have benefited him professionally.

> The information provided in the case was helpful, but sometimes I felt limited by the specific rules and regulations. For example, as a consulting firm, we wanted to propose better/more equipment, but Bauer and Rourke didn't want to spend anything more. Or, they don't want to invest in more equipment (phones, computers) because they will be moving in a few months. Overall, it was good for me to try and figure out solutions that would work for a company because this may be something I have to do in real life.

These findings indicate that the level of detail in the case influenced students' ability to interpret the company's needs and values. Also, when the needs of the audience conflicted, students felt appropriately challenged.

Discussion Students stated that they could interpret the audience's current situation, organizational information, and organizational structure based on various multimedia in the case, including the RFP, website, voicemail, and interview case materials. Warren [17] argued that both demographic and organizational categories are key components of audience analysis. In addition, Albers [1] emphasized the importance of analyzing an audience's social and cultural context to meet an audience's needs and objectives. Students appeared to engage in these types of analysis in the case.

To comfortably identify this information, however, students stated that they preferred more case detail. Rozumalski and Graves [14] confirm this finding when they describe students' reporting a greater sense of audience awareness in more detailed cases. Still, Rogers and Rymer noted that cases should have some level of abstraction and ambiguity to leave students actively engaged in problem solving [11, p. 13]. Furthermore, TPC scholars have argued that writers must also make decisions about which details and facts are most salient for a situation [3], [4], [55]. Dobrin [3] suggests that writers with a sense of audience "can find the needed fact, and once that fact is found, the writer can do the right thing with it" (p. 108).

Given the potential complexity of this process, our teaching case not surprisingly suggests that not all students are comfortable with the same level of detail, or perhaps with making decisions about which details are most important or what to do with the details, causing them to experience difficulty when writing to their audience. For example, students reported difficulty imagining secondary and tertiary audiences because of unfamiliarity with the organization in the case materials.

The case may have needed more contextual information to help students fully understand and interpret multiple audiences. For example, Suchan and Dulek [45] argued that cases should include "profiles of key members of the organization"

(p. 35). When using this case in courses in a later semester, we added on the website additional biographical information about secondary audiences, and our resulting anecdotal experience suggested that students experienced less ambiguity as a result when identifying secondary audiences. Thus, instructors may need to iterate the case materials over semesters to find an adequate balance of detail that leaves students satisfied but also presents them with an appropriate challenge to navigate ambiguity and recognize salient details.

Alternatively, the instructors may have needed to further assist students who needed additional detail. Dobrin [3] argues that one method for developing audience awareness is to present writers with situations in which they must identify and then resolve writing issues that were caused by a misinterpretation of audience (p. 106). Students engaged in peer review to help each other at multiple points throughout the semester do just that. The instructors also provided feedback at one point during the draft stage; however, they could have provided more feedback on drafts to “lead the writer [more] carefully” through the case, especially writers who were less comfortable with the level of detail in the case [3, p. 106].

Students also stated that they could interpret the audience’s values and needs. Turns and Wagner [16] considered values as part of a broader category of analyzing an audience’s culture, and understanding audience needs is a core component and goal of audience analysis and building images of audiences [1], [4], [8], [9], [17]. The case materials appeared to provide students with practice in engaging in these activities. However, some students reported struggling to understand the needs and values of their audience because the needs were unclear or conflicting.

One reason for this experience may be that we placed key information across various case materials, following Saunders’ [46] “in basket” technique. For example, the RFP stated some of the company’s needs (e.g., “Bauer and Rourke has requested proposals from an organization consulting firm to study the situation in the sales department”), the interview and voicemail elaborated on those needs (e.g., “We need someone to come and figure out what’s broken”), and the website revealed further insight about the company’s values and culture (e.g., “Bauer and Rourke believes that the best way it can serve its clients is by first taking care of its employees”). Were students to interpret the audience and situation using only one case component, they would miss information found in other components. Yet, when they accessed information from multiple case materials, a more coherent understanding of the audience and situation could emerge.

Instructors might encourage students to consult all of the materials available to them, foregrounding this point with students as the assignments begin. In particular, instructors could emphasize that in professional employment, students would ideally be able to contact audience members to resolve unclear or conflicting needs; however, research suggests that professionals may not have access to audience members [2] or may face time constraints that do not leave time for contacting audiences [4]. As a result, instructors might highlight how professionals synthesize audience information from multiple sources to draw conclusions and make communication decisions [2], [16].

Instructors might also emphasize what Veltsos noted in her study of the use of role-playing games (RPGs) in professional communication courses.

> Employers will not hand out assignment specifications and rubrics, noisy assignments such as case studies, simulations, and RPGs use possibility and uncertainty to teach students to listen or read carefully, parse instructions, and identify key details [56, p. 199].

Therefore, some interpretation and decision-making is appropriate given the pedagogical need to have students arrive at their own conclusions about an audience’s needs based on available resources. As with most pedagogies, some students will find this process easier, and instructors may need to address students’ individual needs.

What Students Said Helped Them to Respond to the Audience We found students’ stating that they could successfully respond to their audience in three main categories of concern:

1. Credibility
2. Evidence
3. Propriety

Success in Responding With Credibility: Students said that they thought about how best to credibly express their ideas. The case facilitated a way that they could responsibly communicate based on their audience’s concerns and organizational constraints. For example, a student discussed how the RFP helped him to sensitively address his audience's concerns, leading him to avoid including content that would signal disrespect.

> I tried to take a respectful and strategic approach to say things that the audience might not want to hear. I also took the RFP into great consideration when talking about my recommendations, and only stated things that followed what Bauer and Rourke wanted or didn't want.

Another student detailed more specifically her strategy of analyzing keywords in the RFP to respond in a way that would strengthen her ethos.

> There were key words in the case (from both the proposal and the report scenarios) that caused me to adapt how I presented my results. Bauer and Rourke seemed very keen to keep employees and not spend much money, so, even though using those may have led to an easy and effective solution, I knew that I could not suggest that route and still maintain my company's credibility with Bauer and Rourke.

Because the data were anonymous, a student stated that he wrote responsibly and with care about the participants.

> Also, the results masked the individual employees' identities, which caused me to be more careful of how I talked about individuals within this company, keeping in mind that the audience for the report was these individuals' employer.

These results indicate that students could successfully navigate case materials to write sensitively in ways that bolstered their own credibility. No students reported difficulties in responding with credibility.

Success in Responding With Evidence: Students also stated that they could respond with evidence because they were provided data and organizational constraints that prompted them to consider the arguments they could and could not make.

Students reported that the data in the case provided them with content that they could present as an argument. For example, a student said that the quantitative data provided evidence to justify her recommendations.

> The information provided led me to make recommendations that were based on the actual data I received and provided a basis for me to justify those decisions.

This student appeared to find the data as evidence for recommendations she wanted to make. Another student reported that he used the data and project update provided to make decisions about what content to include.

> The methods used, time period, and the data itself [were] all very helpful and made writing the sections easy and straightforward. The data [were] the most helpful and gave me a good idea of what is important to include in each section.

Notably, a student discussed her reasoning not to write about some of the equipment-use data.

> I used the information heavily and tried to use it as much as possible, which is why I had a lot of issues with length. I used all the information, but the computer information the least since there wasn't any strong correlations to the amount of uses per day and it was hard to tell since two people used the computers.

This student noted that the data constrained her presentation. The equipment-use data revealed that multiple employees used a single computer, so she simply could not support certain claims with evidence that did not exist. Through their data analysis, students indicated that they had to decide what data were important to include and to exclude. No students reported difficulty in responding with evidence.

Success in Responding With Propriety: Students also mentioned that the case materials prompted them to consider the tone and style of their writing. A student mentioned formality and professionalism.

> The information provided in the case was extremely helpful in determining my writing style. I was able to decide how formal and professional my writing should be.

Another student mentioned the case data provided to him made him think of what he called "scientific writing," which he compared to "professional writing."

> The information provided helped figure out what type of communication I was going to use for each of those three sections [results, discussion, and recommendations]. Since you could see what percentages of the employees agreed or disagreed with something, that showed me I could use more a scientific writing in the results and discussion section. Then since I was recommending what Bauer and Rourke could do

> to improve their company I switched back to more professional writing.

The student appeared to categorize two different writing styles, and he chose to adopt each style for their own purposes. Another student described how the data influenced her tone as she delivered negative findings.

> Since the data showed that a fair amount of employees were slacking off, I knew I had to express this but in a respectful and light manner. There was also a lot of negative feedback from the employees so I tried to still get their frustration known, but without making the report itself negative.

These results suggest that students considered their credibility, their presentation of evidence, and their writing style when responding to their audience. Students did not indicate that the case materials hindered them from thinking through these considerations. Overall, students appeared to recognize that responding to audiences strategically would develop their credibility as writers and further their arguments.

Discussion These findings correspond to Rogers and Rymer's discussion about the important role that ethos plays in response to case problems, ethos conveyed through students' outside perspectives on the problem, and contributions for resolving it [11, p. 52]. Students reported making decisions to communicate or not to communicate information from the case, decisions that were "uniquely their own yet operable within the constraints of the case situation" (p. 21). The case method that we employed thus put the students' credibility at stake.

In particular, students considered the best way to discuss the data that they were given and the best way to act based on the data, corresponding to Wolfe's discussion that data literacies enable students to make "a series of rhetorical choices" about what the data mean and about how to present them [50, p. 357]. This finding echoes Rogers and Rymer's discussion of how cases can help students "to develop and compare different strategies for solving problems" [11, p. 19]. The data provided students with multiple quantitative and qualitative perspectives from the employer and the employee, all of which they had to analyze and negotiate. Their attention to carefully and strategically choose what data to present and how suggests some audience awareness.

Students also reported adapting their tone and writing style based on the data. Dobrin argues that mastery of an effective writing style for a particular audience suggests that a writer has a "good *sense of audience*" [3, p. 103]. He further argues that when writers with a developed style encounter a new writing task and audience, the writer's style can be disrupted and may be less effective until the writer finds a new style appropriate for the new task and audience. That students reported adapting their tone and style to the case's audience suggests some sense of audience.

Conclusion

We explored the effectiveness of case-method pedagogy to facilitate students' audience awareness. We reported successes and difficulties from the students' perspectives, and we presented ways that TPC instructors can administer case-method pedagogy for similar purposes and as a supplement to or preparation for other approaches to teaching students audience awareness, specifically peer-to-peer interaction and client-based pedagogy.

Specifically, students stated that the case materials helped them understand the facts about their primary audience but were less effective in presenting secondary and tertiary audiences. Students stated that they could identify what the company needed from them, but they also expressed differing views on the amount of detail that they needed to do so. Also, the students reported comfort in responding credibly to the audience using appropriate evidence and effective tone and style. As with other approaches to helping students develop audience awareness, case-method pedagogy has both benefits and drawbacks, but we intend to present to other TPC instructors further ways to improve and research that awareness.

Limitations This teaching case had limitations. First, more data from more students might reveal additional insights about the influence of this teaching approach on student audience awareness, though the 51 reflections from two course sections did provide useful insight. Second, we acknowledge that studying our own students may further influence the results.

Implications for Teaching Despite these limitations, this teaching case provides the following implications for teaching with case-method pedagogy.

First, because students reported discomfort with the level of detail in our case materials, we recommend providing enough information about secondary and tertiary audiences and the business context to enable students to adequately interpret and respond to all audiences. Instructors may need to iterate the case materials over semesters until they find the appropriate amount of detail to help students succeed. Because not all students will be comfortable with the same level of detail, instructors may need to provide feedback to specific students to help them develop the sense of audience necessary to succeed. However, because of the inconsistent level of student discomfort about detail and because determining audience needs—even a real audience's needs—is difficult, we recommend caution in concluding that this discomfort is excessively burdensome. When students struggle to interpret and respond to audiences appropriately, they may become better prepared for navigating the perennial difficulty of effectively anticipating and responding to audience needs.

Second, because students reported making strategic and thoughtful decisions about their recommendations to the audience, we suggest ensuring that case materials provide constraints, such as an audience's conflicting needs. Similarly, because students reported making decisions about how to present their data to make an appropriate argument, we recommend integrating data (both qualitative and quantitative) that students must interpret and present. The data should provide constraints on the solutions that the students may want to recommend.

Finally, because the approach provides a context for students to understand their audiences, we propose cases as a potential intermediate step between the classroom and employment as a means to prepare students for client-based projects or in situations where client-based projects are not possible.

Implications for Research This analysis positions future research on this topic.

First, this study found that students felt various levels of comfort with the amount of detail in the case materials. Although previous research on the case method has found that students ranked audience awareness as more important in detailed cases [14], this study valuably contributes the finding that students differ in their preferences for detail. Future research in case-method pedagogy, especially in TPC, should continue to build on this study and Rozumalski and Graves' [14] work to better understand how much case detail is best, how and why students differ in their preference for detail, and how instructors might intervene to help students.

Second, students reported the ability to interpret and respond to their case audience, suggesting that students were able to identify the external audience in the case materials. TPC researchers have argued that one of the complications of student-client communication in client projects is students' inability to "recognize an audience other than their instructor" [32, p. 194]. This study does not attempt to prove that the case method prepares students for more successful client-based projects, but we propose the case method as an additional bridge between classroom-based and external audiences in the spectrum proposed by Ward [28]. To determine whether the case method serves as effective preparation for client-based projects, future research could examine whether student participation in the case method prior to a client-based project leads to more successful student-client interactions or increased audience awareness.

Last, we believe that cross-referencing student reflections with their actual proposals and reports could reveal further insight into students' rhetorical choices.

As instructors and researchers consider the case method further, we hope that, because of TPC's valuing of audience awareness, this teaching method provides an accessible and effective opportunity that they may use to foster this skill in students.

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