

This transcript has not been edited. Please see *Kairos* for the edited version.

## Rhetorical Roots and Media Future: How Podcasting Fits into the Computers and Writing Classroom

### Episode 6: Other Writing Skills: Audience, Purpose, Context, and Tone

By Jennifer L. Bowie

Transcript of the Podcast

<http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/16.2/topoi/bowie/ep6.html>

Welcome to “Rhetorical Roots and Media Future: How podcasting Fits into the Computers and Writing Classroom” a multimodal project exploring podcasting as a part of a writing class. You are listening to Episode 6: “Other Writing Skills: Audience, Purpose, Context, and Tone.” This is a seven episode podcast series with an interconnected webtext published in *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*. A full transcript of each episode is available on the website and in the lyrics field of this MP3 file.

I am Dr. Jennifer L. Bowie, your host for this series and a Senior Usability Research Analyst for The Home Depot website. This work draws from my experience as an Assistant Professor at Georgia State University. Inside and outside the academy, I teach and research podcasting, digital media, writing, usability, and rhetoric

In this episode, I discuss the rethinking of audience, purpose, context, and tone through podcasts. Without further ado, let us begin Episode 6: “Other Writing Skills: Audience, Purpose, Context, and Tone.”

This transcript has not been edited. Please see *Kairos* for the edited version.

## **Other Writing Skills: Audience, Purpose, Context, and Tone**

Beyond the five canons of rhetoric, I have found incorporating podcasting, especially student-produced podcasts, into the writing classroom leads to increased writing skills in other key areas: audience, purpose, context, and tone.

### **Audience**

In traditional academic writing, many students seem to struggle with the concept of audience. They often write for their real audience—the teacher—but have trouble envisioning and writing for other audiences. However, I have found with podcasting, students consider their audience in ways that are both richer and deeper than what I tend to see in typographic-based texts. As with the other new media like blogs and websites, students have a real audience—they post it online and other people might actually read it. Podcasting seems to lead to further attention to audience. For many students, it seems their voice makes it more personal and increases their investment. Since these are their words from their mouths, the students appear to care more about how they sound to their audience. I have had students speak in slang during a presentation to their peers but work to remove slang from their podcasts with the same audiences. Perhaps because of the increased personal nature of the text for students, they tend to better visualize and consider their audience. Audience analyses I have received for podcast assignments tend to be much more developed than for print texts. Interestingly, they then apply this depth of analysis to their writing in other media.

This transcript has not been edited. Please see *Kairos* for the edited version.

Their audience analyses of texts written after their podcasts are richer, deeper and more thorough.

## **Purpose**

Students who create podcasts seem to become more aware of their purpose. For some of them the purpose moves beyond “just another paper I have to write”. One student, Robert Manfredi, stated this nicely in a reflection: [quote] “I tried to imagine, while writing, that I was talking to someone and not writing a paper that may increase my own stature in the eyes of my teacher” [quote]. This same student saw the podcast as having a broader audience beyond the teacher and because of this states the [quote] “purpose changes because of the change in audience” [unquote]. The students also found they may portray their purpose, among other things, in “more” ways. For example, one student, Angela Johnson stated [quote] “The podcast is stronger because I get to use more than just words: I have tone, inflection, delivery, and sound” [end quote]. In addition, music, word choice, speed, pauses and more may be used to better match their purpose with tone and other aspects of writing. Like the richer audience analyses that students developed for first their podcasts and then later writing, the richer purpose they considered for their podcasts was then applied to later work—podcasts or other writing. Thus, in both cases it seems that once students began applying these concepts more deeply in one medium, they brought these new skills and considerations to their future writing, regardless of media. My podcasting students became stronger writers in print and other media because of what they learned while podcasting.

This transcript has not been edited. Please see *Kairos* for the edited version.

## Context

The next writing skill, context, is often one I find students spend little time on. This makes sense. Often the context of the true reader of their work—me, their teacher—is not going to greatly impact their text. Most likely I will be reading it at a desk or similar location with decent lighting and relatively minimal distractions. Students also have a good grasp of my context as reader—at least from general personality and interests, and occasionally my pet peeves. While my technical communications students who create manuals may play a bit more with context, often there are not enough differences in context from most of their other school writing for students to need to make many, if any, alterations. This changes significantly with podcasting. While my students may know where I listen to podcasts, the variety of contexts—driving, exercising, doing chores, sitting at my computer—complicates their understanding of my context. We also discuss where they and their audiences may listen to podcasts. The physical context of their audience—time, location, environment, distractions—may vary tremendously and students grasp this concept quickly and easily. In fact, in some cases, as this student, Tiana Clark, discusses, they see the variable context as an advantage:

[quote] I think the thing that makes podcasting an argument so great is the feeling of comfort. I felt like the person listening to my podcast could either be in their car on the way to work or simply in the bathtub. This made me feel at ease, I felt that those things alone could help me connect to the people that I am making the podcast for. [end quote]

This transcript has not been edited. Please see *Kairos* for the edited version.

As this student points out, the varying context helps them feel like they are connecting more to their audience—despite or maybe even because of the distractions. Students also seem to think more about other aspects of context—such as the educational level and background of the listeners. Students especially seem to consider language choices based on their audience’s context. Podcasts seem more personal to many listeners because the speaker is there, in their ears and head, in a way the writer of a print text is not. For this student and others, the personal nature of the podcast texts seems to work in coordination with context to make the podcasting media an advantageous choice for them.

### **Tone**

The final area of writing I am discussing here is tone. For many of my students tone becomes a much more meaningful writing consideration and technique. While students writing typographic-based texts need to consider how they will express themselves for their audience to correctly interpret the text, these typographic text authors have only a limited scope of tone tools to utilize. They have word choice, flow, sentence density, language complexity and other word-based areas to draw from. In some cases they have some visual choices that they may use to support a tone—such as typography, color, visual arrangement, and so on. With podcasting, the student’s tone toolkit is expanded. They have the same word-based and visuals-based choices, but they now have auditory choices—from sound levels, diction, vocal tone, to music and silences. With these expanded tools, tone becomes a bigger consideration and in many ways a more powerful technique for the writers. Since students use their own voice to set tone, this makes it more personal to them and literally connects tone with voice—both to their speaking

This transcript has not been edited. Please see *Kairos* for the edited version.

voice and to their voice within the text. As one student, Ian Cho, put it [quote] “tone and style become shockingly personal on the podcast level” [quote]. While voice and tone have strong connections in any text, these connections become more obvious to many writers. While students may see a variety of audiences for their print-based texts, many tend to get caught up in the academic tone they use for their teachers. The students know that the teachers are often their only real audience, and the ones who grade them, and we should not be surprised when they write for their teachers. With a podcast, where students are literally speaking to their audience, they seem to be able to move away from the academic tone. Ian Cho discusses this issue in his reflection on composing for a print-based argument and podcast-based argument:

[quote] The main difference between the paper and the podcast was the tone. For the paper, I used the academic, argumentative tone. Cool, collected, and even-headed. There were no real embellishments or a distinct sense of voice. I found it hard to fully detach myself from the academic voice when writing the paper argument, and so it comes across as dry and rather boring. The podcast, on the other hand, was more personal, more in depth. I found it easier to cite examples and explain them better. The starkest difference was that I found that first-person was pertinent to the podcast medium. Since you are physically talking into a microphone, to a listening audience, I deemed the tone should be more conversational, more personal, less academic, less dry, and injected a bit more personality into it. [unquote]

This transcript has not been edited. Please see *Kairos* for the edited version.

So, as with audience, purpose, and context, students seem to be able to consider and apply tone more thoroughly and deeply when composing a podcast text. As Cho in the quotation above points out, they appear to more easily move beyond the academic tone, audience, purpose, and context, to something more appropriate and the result is a stronger argument.

As with the five canons, students consider and reconsider these four writing skills, audience, purpose, context, and tone, in deeper ways while podcasting. They often take them beyond what they apply in their typographic-based texts and think about these concepts in new and exciting ways—new for them and exciting for the students, and also for us, their listeners and teachers. Like with the five canons, students take their deeper understandings and applications of these concepts to their other writing—print texts and digital texts alike—often becoming stronger writers because of their work with podcasts.

*[Musical transition]*

This concludes Episode 6: “Other Writing Skills: Audience, Purpose, Context, and Tone.” I hope you enjoyed it! If you missed them, do listen to episodes 3– 5, where I explore how the rhetorical canon may be reconsidered and reapplied in podcast texts. I examine invention in episode 3, arrangement and style in episode 4, and memory and delivery in episode 5. In episode 7, I wrap things up and talk about the future. If you have not listened to the first two episodes, I suggest you do. In episode 1, I set this article up and provide a 101 on podcasting. In episode, 2 I look at some of the literature related

This transcript has not been edited. Please see *Kairos* for the edited version.

to podcasts. These all are, of course, part of the multimodal text “Rhetorical Roots and Media Future: How Podcasting Fits into the Computers and Writing Classroom.”

This multimodal text was published in *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*. Please check out the full webtext on *Kairos* at

<http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/16.2/topoi/bowie>. Full reference information,

transcript, and links are available in the webtext and also in the lyrics field of the MP3.

All student samples in this podcast were used with full permission. The music used in

this podcast is “6” off *Ghosts I* by Nine Inch Nails, which is available under an

[Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike Creative Commons License](#).

This text is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share](#)

[Alike 3.0 United States License](#). Rights to the student samples are reserved by their

authors. Please give me, Jennifer L. Bowie, and *Kairos* credit, don’t make money off of

this, and share any derivative works.

Thanks for listening!

## Album Art

Album art designed by Jennifer L. Bowie. Images:

- ◆ Ruhsam, William. (2008). “AKG Perception 220 Microphone.” Posted 8/17/2008 on Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/bruhsam/3031270525/> with an Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 2.0 Generic Creative Commons License.

This transcript has not been edited. Please see *Kairos* for the edited version.

- ◆ Brassey, Anna a. (1878-83). Illustration from *A Voyage in the Sunbeam, our Home on the Ocean for Eleven Months*. Image is in the public domain. Artist may not be Brassey, but no other information was available.

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anna\\_Brassey\\_438-victorian-woman-writing-jornal.gif](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anna_Brassey_438-victorian-woman-writing-jornal.gif)