

“Very often people don’t listen to you when you speak to them. It’s only when you talk to yourself that they prick up their ears.” John Ashbery

| | Sharing, but no response | Response, but no criticism or evaluation | Criticism or evaluation |
|---|-----------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Audience with authority, e.g., teachers, editors, supervisors, employers | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Audience of peers | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Audience of allies -- readers who particularly care for the writer | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Audience of self alone -- private writing | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Some Questions for Non Evaluative or Non Critical Responding

... most people are far more anxious to express their approval and disapproval of things than to describe them.” (C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words*, 7)

- What does the text say? What is the main idea?--the supporting ideas?
- What does it almost say? (What thoughts and ideas or attitudes do you hear **almost** stated or hovering around the edges? What does the writer imply or assume? What is the writer’s point of view or stance? What follows or what are the consequences of what is said? How does the text ask you to see the world?)
- What are some local “centers of gravity” or “focuses of energy” (not main points)?
- Believing feedback: be an ally or pretend to believe fully the writer’s view--and find further points, support, or evidence. What would a person do who believed what is said?
- How is the text organized or structured? How does the arrangement of parts relate to what the text says and what it does?
- Describe the writer’s voice, tone, stance.
- Who does the text speak to or imply as reader?
- How does the writing relate to things in our culture?--to other texts around us?
- How does this piece relate to other things the writer has said or written? How does it relate to events in the writer’s life? Why did the writer write these thoughts?

Describing your response--but omitting evaluative responses:

- Which words or sections do you like or remember?
- What do you want to hear more about?
- As reader, what are *your* thoughts on the topic? Where do you agree or disagree? (This is not evaluative: we often agree with bad writing and disagree with good writing.)
- Give “movies of your mind” as you were reading: tell the story of the actual thoughts, feelings, and reactions that went on in your mind as you were reading. This is easiest if you periodically interrupt your reading and tell or write what has been going on in your mind. (But leave out evaluative reactions.)

(Probably the least interesting to ask of a text is: “How good is it?” Or “What’s weak?”)

I’m drawing on two of my essays: “Closing My Eyes as I Speak: An Argument For Ignoring Audience” and “A Map of Writing in Terms of Audience and Response.” *Everyone Can Write: Essays Toward a Hopeful Theory of Writing and Teaching Writing*. NY: Oxford, 2000.