"I write for myself and strangers," said Gertrude Stein, making explicit the principle that guides the writing of most skilled authors, professional and otherwise. In contrast, "I write for myself alone" or "I write for myself and intimates" appears to guide the composition of many students and other less skilled writers, as an examination of their texts reveals. Students or other writers who learn to accommodate an audience are embarked on the road to professionalism.

Skilled writers of personal essays, autobiographies, and even some letters, demonstrate a conscious concern for their external audience even as they write personal materials, because they recognize that the audience is not likely to know them personally or to know much about their world. Such writers are, in Linda Flower's terminology, reader-oriented. To accommodate their imagined audience, these skilled autobiographers supply sufficient information and interpret the relevant contexts and details of their lives to enable readers, Stein's audience of "strangers," to understand the prose for themselves.

In contrast, the works of less skilled autobiographical writers are intensely writer-oriented. The authorial persona that emerges from the text is likely to be uncontrolled, at considerable variance from the persona the author imagines he or she is presenting. The available materials, or the author's whims rather than artistic considerations, are likely to determine the arrangement, proportioning, and emphasis of the work. The resulting text may be extremely private, excluding most readers. Or else it is self-indulgent, including trivia, repetition, or peripheral matters acceptable only to readers tolerant of the banal and the narcissistic—perhaps the author's relatives, for whom such details assume unique but highly personal significance.

This paper will demonstrate how skilled writers of autobiography control the authorial perspective and persona, pro-
portioning, emphasis, and interpretation of material as accommodations to an external audience, while less skilled writers are more likely to leave these matters to chance or to neglect them entirely. It will also show how student writers can learn these professional concerns and techniques, through comparing, analyzing, and editing parallel autobiographical texts by skilled and unskilled writers, published and unpublished. In so doing, they will inevitably address such concerns as: What is the significance of the life or events that I'm reading about? How can I tell? Why is one text or a particular authorial persona more interesting (or more boring) than the other? Why would I (or anyone else unfamiliar with the subject) want to read more about the subject—or to avoid it? What do readers, including myself, need to know that the writers have (or have not) supplied? And, finally, how can I apply what I have learned to my own writing?

These questions can be answered with relation to the concerns identified above and specified in parentheses below, as students learn to consider, almost routinely, such matters as:

1. Who will read this? (a concern of audience, perspective)

2. Why? What will the potential readers find interesting, significant? Why? What will seem to them uninteresting, trivial? Why? (concerns of content, emphasis, style, interpretation, possibly persona)

3. What needs to be added or eliminated to emphasize what's interesting, important? (concerns of emphasis, proportioning, interpretation)

4. Does the overall organization reflect this emphasis? Does the arrangement of details, incidents reinforce this emphasis? (arrangement)

5. How self-contained or self-evident is the text? How much overt interpretation is it necessary to supply? (concerns of interpretation, perspective)

6. What kind of person will the readers think the author is, as a character static or changing in this work, and as an author per se? (concerns of persona)

The following materials enable excellent analytic comparisons and provoke lively discussions, though many alternatives are available—from historical societies, local or family archives, or from the students themselves. Bibliographies such
as those by Kaplan and Briscoe reveal a wealth of published works; a selected list of excellent autobiographies of particular interest to students is appended here.

"The Diary of Isaac Dodd" (unpublished) and Mark Twain's Autobiography both deal, in part, with explorations of rural and small town America of bygone days. "The Diary of a Michigan Farmer's Wife" (unpublished) and Natalie Crouter's Forbidden Diary: A Record of Wartime Internment, 1941-45 are day-by-day accounts of the minutiae of everyday family and community life, written by fortyish wives and mothers. One lived on a farm in Michigan; the other, however, along with her family and five hundred other Americans, was a prisoner of war in a Japanese internment camp in the Philippines. Fanny Marks Siebels's vanity press Wishes Are Horses: Montgomery, Alabama's First Lady of the Violin focuses on the author's childhood and increasing maturation as a young woman, as does Maxine Hong Kingston's award-winning The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts—but with significant differences, literal and metaphorical.

Authorial perspective. Skilled writers, professional or otherwise, are able to look at their emerging texts from the intended readers' point(s) of view as well as their own. This imaginative perspective enables them to determine: (1) What information or background material they need to provide to enable the reader to understand the text. (2) What interpretations of this material they need to furnish to control the reader's responses, or at least to encourage him or her to understand the author's point of view. (3) What they should omit from their final text that the reader will find uninteresting, trivial, peripheral, obvious, or irrelevant, irrespective of their own devotion to such material.

A naive writer, such as Isaac Dodd, lacks this perspective. His account of July 4, 1903, begins:

Hurrah for the 127th anniversary [sic] of National Independence. Hot as fury and not a bit of rain to mar the happiness of anyone. I spent the glorious fourth this year the best I ever did in my life. I had a good time and a splendid ride ad saw lots of sights more than I could remember. I woke up at 6 a.m. at Number 719 Lehigh Ave., Sayre, Pa. I ate breakfast and visited awhile. Then Brown had orders to take a fast freight to Suspension Bridge 205 miles. So he told me to get ready and go along and after some persuading I consented to go. So I donned a pair of overalls and a frock and an old cap, put on a bold front, picked up an 8 x 12 dinnar and went over on the RR track and mounted the Cab of Locomotive No. 753
and away we started about 7:45 a.m. We rode along at a good rate of speed with 25 loaded cars behind us and I hadn't [sic] been on long before I began to enjoy myself. Some of the stations we went past are as follows. East Waverly, Lockwood, Van Etten, Cayuta, Odessa, Burdett, Lodi, Ovid, Kendalia, Geneva, Clifton Springs and Manchester the end of one division... We went past Farmington, Victor, Fisher, Mendon, Rush, Rochester Junction, Caledonia, Le­Roy, Stafford, Batavia, Corfu and Depew.

Dodd's account, typical of many diarists, is strictly for himself. Although he cannot, therefore, be held responsible for failing to accommodate an external audience, it is nonetheless instructive for students to examine texts innocent of this consideration. And it's more comfortable for them to look over the shoulder of a forgotten diarist such as Dodd than to subject the private writings of themselves or their peers to critical scrutiny. When they ask, "Who will read this?" there can be no answer other than "Dodd alone. He's the only one who knows who Brown is, and why he himself is at "719 Lehigh Ave, Sayre, Pa."; an external audience does not. Why does he find the list of names of towns significant? Perhaps he's on vacation, and this is an itemization of the towns he "went past." Outside readers would need more context to enable them to understand where Dodd is, who he's with, and why he's taking this excursion.

On the other hand, why did Dodd begin this narrative with "I woke up at 6 a.m." and end with "and, to conclude I was ready to retire at once. 11:50 p.m. and I for one was all tired out but very well pleased?" Since neither Dodd nor any other potential readers would need to remember this trivial information, we can infer that he put it in from a desire for completeness—that's how his day began and ended. When young children learn to write, explains Donald Graves in "Blocking and the Young Writer," they structure their narratives on a bed-to-bed framework, as does this naive adult writer. Students can easily see that these details are intrinsically boring, and are peripheral to Dodd's account and emphasis (as is the number of the locomotive cab in which he rode, 753); these could be eliminated if the diary were revised to accommodate an external audience.

When students compare Dodd's list of places, presumably in geographical order, with a list of foods that Twain provides in his Autobiography, they can recognize from the rhetorical arrangement how Twain intended to appeal to an external audience:
It was a heavenly place for a boy, that farm of my uncle John's. The house was a double log one, with a spacious floor [roofed over, like a porch] connecting it with the kitchen. In the summer the table was set in the middle of that shady and breezy floor, and the sumptuous meals—well, it makes me cry to think of them. Fried chicken, roast pig; wild and tame turkeys, ducks, and geese; venison just killed; squirrels, rabbits, pheasants, partridges, prairie-chickens; biscuits, hot batter cakes, hot buckwheat cakes, hot "wheat bread," hot rolls, hot corn pone; fresh corn boiled on the ear, succotash, butterbeans, stringbeans, tomatoes, peas, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes; buttermilk, sweet milk, "clabber"; watermelons, muskmelons, cantaloupes—all fresh from the garden; apple pie, peach pie, pumpkin pie, apple dumplings, peach cobbler—I can't remember the rest. (12)

The long list reinforces Twain's thesis that the farm "was a heavenly place for a boy." He doesn't need to say that the food is abundant, or that it is fresh and wholesome, farm-grown and homemade; Twain can count on his readers' common experiences to enable them to recognize and appreciate these delectable features. The groupings of food are logical, not random or casual: domestic meat, fowl, wild game, breads—all hot—, vegetables, culminating in fruits and desserts that would end the meal. Although Twain might have omitted some foods—certainly not all would have been served at a single meal—their large number and the rhythmic cadence established by the accents on first syllables and first words, and the pauses between clusters, enhance Twain's deliberate impression of delicious sumptuousness. Everything belongs. Even the chronic dieters among Twain's readers will find the scene irresistible.

Arrangement. Naive writers usually arrange autobiographical material either according to the order in which they have experienced an event (as we saw in Isaac Dodd's journey) or come to know a phenomenon, or according to the order in which they remember it. If either order addresses the readers' perspective or need to understand the material, such accommodation is accidental. For instance, naive writers almost invariably describe their houses by walking the reader through according to a floor plan clear as a blueprint in the reader's mind, but seldom as apparent to readers unfamiliar with the actual layout. Most students' first tries will resemble the mode of this one:

When you come in the front hall, the large living room is on your left. The walls are painted blue and it has five windows. Upon leaving the living room you can either go straight through, into the dining room, or turn right and cross the hall into the paneled
den, which has a fireplace. Past the dining room is the kitchen, and off that is a patio and a small bathroom. From there you can either go into the den, the front hall, upstairs, or down into the basement.

That is, if you can figure out how to get there from here. In contrast, writers of real estate ads, though scarcely producing models of exemplary prose, are distinctly reader-oriented, and convey the house's significant features with economical hyperbole, as in this ad for a

Stunningly beau. Colonial home on gorgeous professionally planted lot w/deck & patio overlooking pvt. treed yd! 5 oversized bedrms. & 3 full baths up (master bedrm. has joint dressing rm), loads of storage & closets! 1st flr. has lge. liv. rm. w/fpl., formal din. rm., bright kit. w/finest updated appls. adjoined by huge breakfast area, study w/full bath & exceptionally lovely fam. rm. w/firepl! Lower area has lg. rec. rm., w/firepl., wet bar & full bath. Gas heat & CAC, 2 car garage! $349,900. Eves. 229-2816.

This ad moves from the house's style, to the lot (with deck, patio, trees), to provide an overview of each floor, from top to bottom, with the dominant impressions being "huge," "bright," "updated," and "exceptionally lovely." The house's most unusual and attractive features are identified; its price, extremely high, is appropriately last.

Likewise, Natalie Crouter's physical descriptions of the internment camp near Baguio, in the Philippines, usually emphasize the dominant impression of the scene, psychologically as well as visually:

Our camp is lucky to have the beauty of pines, blue sky, clouds, and mountains. We could not be detained in a lovelier place. I have not been conscious of being a prisoner yet, do not notice the barbed wire, fence or guards, bayonets or guns. Even the machine gun trained on us for two days, covered with canvas, made little impression. For a while it was touch and go, so I no doubt should have had more fear and perhaps did, subconsciously. Most of us can walk on the path right at a soldier coming forward with bayonet held out and remain unmoved. Are we too tired or have we had too much taken away to be bothered by small things? (2/6/42, p. 19)

In Crouter's view, the camp's overwhelmingly beautiful setting suppresses the impedimenta of imprisonment, barbed wire, guards, and guns. She contrasts the beauty and the grimness of the setting, and concludes by putting the wartime dangers ("small things" such as the possibility of running into a
bayonet) into an eternal perspective. The description moves from the sky to the earth, the distant to the immediate, the vast to the small, controlled and interpreted. In many individual paragraphs Crouter achieves stylistic distinction. But she was not, until the publication of this Diary forty years after she wrote it, a professional writer, and she needed the help of a professional editor not to change the words that she actually wrote, but to alter their proportioning.

Proportioning/emphasis. Proportioning determines emphasis. Naive writers too often ignore this precept that skilled writers seem to understand intuitively (though my assumption is that they have actually learned this through repeated rewriting over the years). The development of a self-critical facility is one mark of a professional writer. This involves not only the ability to discriminate between the important and the unimportant, but a willingness to delete repetitive, redundant, or peripheral material to emphasize themes, characterizations, motifs that may emerge either during the experiences themselves or in the course of writing about them. The original version of Natalie Crouter's diary, five thousand typescript pages, emphasized her major concerns—with the monotonous daily diet, with endless arguments over personal space, with the minutes of innumerable committee meetings, with internecine wrangling over petty privileges—in far more redundant detail than external readers would have been able to tolerate. Even though Crouter was writing for an audience, she could not detach herself sufficiently from these matters to delete anything.

But if given five-ten pages of the original typescript, student readers-turned-editors quickly develop the 20-20 vision of hindsight. Working either in groups or individually, they vigorously delete what they find boring or unnecessary, and from their texts usually emerge the same themes I, as a professional editor, emphasized in the final text of the diary that I cut down by 90%. They either stress the American values of democracy, resourcefulness, education, social organization, and family life. Or they highlight Crouter's own values of independence, integrity, fairness, open-mindedness (she saw both Japanese and Americans as individuals, not as national stereotypes), grace under pressure, and humor:

Little Ronnie took the mouse in a trap to the cat, opened the trap, released the little mouse, upon which the cat pounced, then Ronnie ate the bait, which was a peanut. (10/17/44)
When they've finished, we compare their edited versions with the published text, and discuss the rationale for the variations—is it better this way, or that way, or yet another way? This enables the students to develop working principles that discriminate between the important and the unimportant, the interesting and the dull, the memorable and the forgettable.

**Extent of interpretation.** In contrast to professional writers, whose selection, arrangement of, and commentary on their material constantly interprets it, naive writers are content either to think their material is self-explanatory or to be unaware that it needs interpretation for an unfamiliar audience. Although such interpretation is not necessary solely for the author of a private diary, students can profitably examine such texts to determine what would have to be added or explained to make the material understandable to outside readers and to make manifest its latent significance. Thus they can profitably scrutinize such bed-to-bed excerpts from the "Diary of the Michigan Farmer's Wife" as:

**Sunday, September 3, 1950—12 eggs**

A rainy day. Well I slept in got up at 11. dad got up. Jimmi and Fred, they got the septic tank in. took down the tent I was just getting breakfast at noon when here come Jean her three little kids. Mrs. Morris Ed I cant think of his last name and to weman picked 8 pints of raspberries. Ed picked 1/2 of bean's gave dad $2.00. Later Cook came a young couple with him, bought 4 quarters fresh cream, Nancy baked a cake Sharon frosted it. I made two pies, Barrett Broad was here too, Nancy and Carlin went fishing. So they didn't get the ice cream. Nancy made a meat loaf it was good. Nancy gave me a Toni to-nite, we play Pinochal while Nancy was working on my hair, then Warren and Ronny came so Nancy and the two boys played Canasta, left for Alpena near 12, for hamburgers. Sharon went out this morning, its most 1:45 guess I'll go to bed too.

Here every activity receives equal emphasis and no interpretation—installing the septic tank, taking down the tent, cooking breakfast at noon, selling vegetables, making pies. Students can learn to ask, what are the most significant activities? The least important? Which need to be explained, interpreted in the greatest amount of detail? Which can be downplayed, or even edited out—if they're too insignificant, or unclear without additional explanation that would give them undue importance. Who are the main characters, and what relationships have they to one another? How clearly can their relationships be inferred
from the text? Does any background information have to be supplied?

In contrast is the amount and nature of the interpretation that Mark Twain supplies in nine sentences about his childhood experiences with bats. He assumes that his readers don't know him and his mother and their relationship, or Hannibal, Missouri, but that they already have their own views about bats, and adjusts his details accordingly:

I think a bat is as friendly a bird as there is. My mother was Aunt Patsy's sister and had the same wild superstitions. A bat is beautifully soft and silky; I do not know any creature that is pleasanter to the touch or is more grateful for caressings, if offered in the right spirit. I know all about these coleoptera, because our great cave, three miles below Hannibal, was multitudinously stocked with them, and often I brought them home to amuse my mother with. It was easy to manage if it was a school day, because then I had ostensibly been to school and hadn't any bats. She was not a suspicious person, but full of trust and confidence; and when I said, "There's something in my coat pocket for you," she would put her hand in. But she always took it out again, herself; I didn't have to tell her. It was remarkable, the way she couldn't learn to like private bats. The more experience she had, the more she could not change her views.

Twain begins with two overt assessments of bats—their temperament ("friendly") and their touch ("soft and silky"). His interpretive and intentionally erroneous identification of bats as "birds" and "coleoptera" is a sophisticated joke. Bats can't be both, and Twain not only counts on the readers to know that they are neither, but to recognize that he as an author knows this as well, and that he as an adult author is playing a trick on less knowledgeable readers, just as Twain the boy played a trick on his unsuspecting mother. He identifies his mother, in relationship ("Aunt Patsy's sister"—about whom Twain had just been talking), in character "not a suspicious person, but full of trust and confidence," and in actions—she never caught on to her son's tricks, and always put her hand into his pocket—to encounter a bat. He identifies the bat cave in size ("great") and location ("three miles below Hannibal"). And he characterizes himself as a child, mostly by implication. He lets the readers know that he played hookey by saying he had "ostensibly been to school" when in fact he had been to the bat cave. He shows how he tricked his mother. And he demonstrates his talent for comic understatement by allowing the child prankster and adult
authorial roles to blend in his overt interpretation of his mother's invariable reaction to discovering a bat in his pocket: "It was remarkable, the way she couldn't learn to like private bats," supplying the final, interpretive comic touch with "private"—for surely she wouldn't have liked public bats any better.

**Persona.** All autobiographical writings of whatever quality present personae, intentional or not. The more skilled the writer, the more numerous, varied, individualized, and complex are these personae, as the central character plays various roles at different stages of his or her life. The more skilled the writer, the greater the control over both the personae and the readers' reactions to them, as we have seen in the above example from Twain.

Authors of inartistic autobiographies, published or unpublished, are likely to let the persona emerge unwittingly from the materials, rather than shaping the evidence to reinforce a preconceived and therefore self-controlled authorial image. Indeed, a major discrepancy between the author's intended persona and the actual one is a sure sign of an amateur writer. For instance, in *Wishes are Horses: Montgomery, Alabama's First Lady of the Violin*, novice writer Fanny Marks Seibels claims to be devoting most of the book to demonstrating her development and supremacy as a musician. Yet, characteristic of her discussion of her attempt to establish a concert career in New York at sixteen is this passage:

> At this point my memory plays me tricks. I have long thought that Ethel Barrymore in *Cousin Kate* was the first play that I saw in New York. But no! She was not playing *Cousin Kate* in 1900; she was starring in *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines*. And I know that I did not see her in *Captain Jinks*; for in September, 1902 I saw *Captain Jinks* (without Ethel Barrymore) in Montgomery. It was the night of the marriage of Jenny Wadsworth to Ira Virgin. I played at the wedding. Later, I went to the theatre with "Mr. Seibels." (80)

Who is the audience for this text? Students invariably conclude that Seibels is writing essentially for herself, for the author alone would know or care about such trivia as when she first saw Ethel Barrymore or *Captain Jinks*, and she alone would remember dates according to weddings at which she performed. Only an amateur author ignorant of the conventions of identifying new characters the first time they are introduced would refer to unknown people, such as "Jenny Wadsworth" and "Ira Virgin" without telling who they are. This inattention to au-
dience reinforces the unwitting image of the authorial persona as an egotist entirely preoccupied with trivia that not even an intimate friend would appreciate; such an unintended persona undermines the persona Seibels thinks she is presenting throughout, that of Montgomery, Alabama's "first lady of the violin."

Does Seibels' persona, overt or implied, change over time as one would expect a narrative of maturation to reveal? No. Her account of her wedding a decade later, when she has presumably matured from a sixteen-year-old to a world traveler and semi-professional violinist, echoes in its lack of analysis and absorption with trivia the shallow, immature persona of ten years earlier. Using a formula derived, perhaps, from the society pages, she focuses on her dress ("Miss Lunt had given me the material; Miss Annie Beader made it"), the music, her attendants, and the fact that "My presents were elaborate; I think they were the most beautiful that any girl ever received" (216). Not only does Seibels's account ignore the groom, but their relationship, feelings, motivations for marriage, and possible expectations of her changed role.

In contrast is Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. Among its most notable features are the myriad of personae, manifestations of Kingston's selves, past, present, and future, which she has recreated and created in the process of continuing to "sort out what's just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living" (p. 239). Simply by being born she acquires the persona of a Chinese girl in a dual culture, American and Chinese: "Even now China wraps double binds around my feet" (p. 57).

To assert herself and to reject the unacceptable Chinese stereotype of girls as worthless ("Better to raise geese than girls."), Kingston as a schoolgirl adopts a thoroughly unfeminine persona, almost sexless. She twists her mouth, affects a limp, speaks in a "dried-duck" voice, and wears flapping shoes (pp. 221-226). Later, as a diligent and brilliant student she adopts the role of a scholar: "I'm smart. I can do all kinds of things. I know how to get A's . . . . I can make a living and take care of myself" (p. 234). Her scholarly self enables her to metamorphose into her own person, an independent-minded adult writer, analytic, critical, and self-critical but with a sense of humor: "Even now, unless I'm happy, I burn the food when I cook. I do not feed people. I let the dirty dishes rot" (p. 56). Through the
superimposed persona of the mythical Woman Warrior, a com-
plex metaphor brought to life, Kingston combines the multiple
personae of daughter and mother, wife and warrior, rebel leader
and obedient servant. Through the act and artifact of auto-
biography, the strong, positive persona of the Woman Warrior
becomes the Woman Writer, her direct and powerful descen-
dant.

Through close textual examining, editing, and rewriting
of actual autobiographical texts, published and unpublished, stu-
dents, too, can become direct and powerful writers. They can
learn, firsthand, how writer-oriented materials can be trans-
formed into reader-oriented materials through adjustments in
focus, arrangement of materials, proportioning and emphasis,
extent and nature of interpretation, creation and control of a
persona. After experience in remodeling the shape and sub-
stance of others’ lives, they’re ready to undertake the creation
and re-creation of their own—a divine prerogative made
human.

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