

Plot Yourself: An Audience Analysis Activity Modified for Online Learning

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Abstract

This activity allows students to become visual depictions during audience analysis. The activity can be used in a face-to-face or online delivery, and also used as a post-assessment. The activity uses an interactive Google Sheet to replicate the act of moving around the classroom and provides an active approach to audience analysis. This active approach creates a bonding experience for students to begin exploring audience members' knowledge and interest in topics to examine what it means to analyze an audience.

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Audience analysis is an important topic discussed in a variety of classes including public speaking, public relations, and many other communication courses. What the act of audience analysis is and what purpose it serves vary from course to course. There is, however, a need for audience analysis activities that allow students to immerse themselves in the process. Audience analysis allows the communicator to better connect the message to the intended audience. One of

the main functions of audience analysis allows for the identification of audience members and helping to connect the communicator with those individuals (Lucas, 2007). But what does exploring the concept of audience analysis look like? Can we find a way to allow students to become data points in the audience analysis process to explore what it looks like? The “plot yourself” activity presented here allows students the opportunity to explore audience analysis elements in a face-to-face classroom or online classroom. Also, it allows for a post-assessment analysis. The activity is an interactive and fun application of audience analysis concepts.

Activities Consistent Across Modalities

Students want interactive activities and a chance to construct their learning (Chi, 2009). Often when trying to replicate a successful activity for online instruction, it is difficult to accomplish the same instructional quality. Instructors are concerned about the consistency of activities in face-to-face classrooms and then being able to replicate those activities in an online environment (Farmer & West, 2019). It may not be possible to have an effective activity automatically transferred into the online learning environment. The “plot yourself” activity has functions built in to allow it to be used with no technology in the classroom, technology in the classroom, or even to use the activity in an online setting (Martin, 2022). Instructors need to have activities that can easily and seamlessly pivot from one modality to another (Tatum & Broeckelman-Post, 2022). The “plot yourself” activity allows for use in a variety of settings.

Activity

Regardless of the modality (online/face-to-face) of the activity, students have read an article or chapter on audience analysis or audience adaptation. Students also have a speech topic for the upcoming speech. Students announce their speech topic, and all other students then complete a few steps outlined later in the article. In an informative speech, for example, a student

might choose “the evolution of video game music”. That subject prompts students to give immediate audience analysis feedback. The students move around the room or plot themselves on an electronic spectrum outlined in the variations below. The activity is ideally facilitated with 20 students in 50 minutes. The activity is described below in two different iterations. While describing the activity, this article uses an informative speech to explain the activity.

Face to Face

The instructor should place large post-it notes on the four walls of the room creating two spectrums depending on the speech or assignment. The spectrums are labeled front to back: “High Knowledge”/ “Low Knowledge”. Side to side: “High Interest”/ “Low Interest”. The words in quotations are what is written on the signs on each wall. It is also ideal to limit the amount of furniture in the room to have an open space to move around.

After the room is set up, instruct each student that they will announce their speech topic. All of the other students will then become “data points” on the visual spectrum. The students will place themselves toward the high-knowledge end of the spectrum if they feel they know a lot about the topic. Simultaneously, they do the same for the second prompt if they are interested or not interested. After all of the students are positioned, and they begin to talk about questions they have for the audience and what suggestions the audience might have for the speaker. As the students stand on their “spot” the speaker can ask them questions and audience members can provide details as to why they moved to this spot. Each topic should take 3-5 minutes to move around and go through the conversation. The first few students take a bit of prompting to generate conversation. But after that, the students generate their conversation naturally. A few questions to generate the conversation include:

For the audience members:

1. Why did you move to that spot?
2. What would make you change your spot?

For the speaker:

3. What patterns do you see?
4. Where is your target audience?

*The spectrums can change. For example, the persuasive speech one spectrum is agree/disagree.

Repeat the process for each student's topic. At the end of the activity, students will all have visualized how their classmates plot themselves on the two spectrums.

Online Adaptation

In the online variation, the act of moving around the room is replicated with a [Google sheet](#) that plots the students' position on the grid¹. In face-to-face classes, students would use their bodies as scatterplot dots and move around the room with right to left being a designated description and front to back being another designation (interest, knowledge, agreement, etc.). The Google sheet does the same thing by having students select a number on one tab and the second tab then plots them. This can be run in a live Zoom meeting or can be filled out during an asynchronous class. The activity is the same as using their bodies in a room but can now be visualized in two simple steps.

Using Google sheets, students would select numbers on a scale from 1-10 for the two prompts. Figure 1 shows tab number one. Each student has their own row. There are two columns to report "scores" for the two spectrums. For example, Student A chose an interest level of 8 and a knowledge of 2. For each area, 10 would be the highest, and 1 would be the lowest. Figure 1 shows the first tab where students select their numbers.

¹ The link allows for copying the plot activity and editing to one's preference.

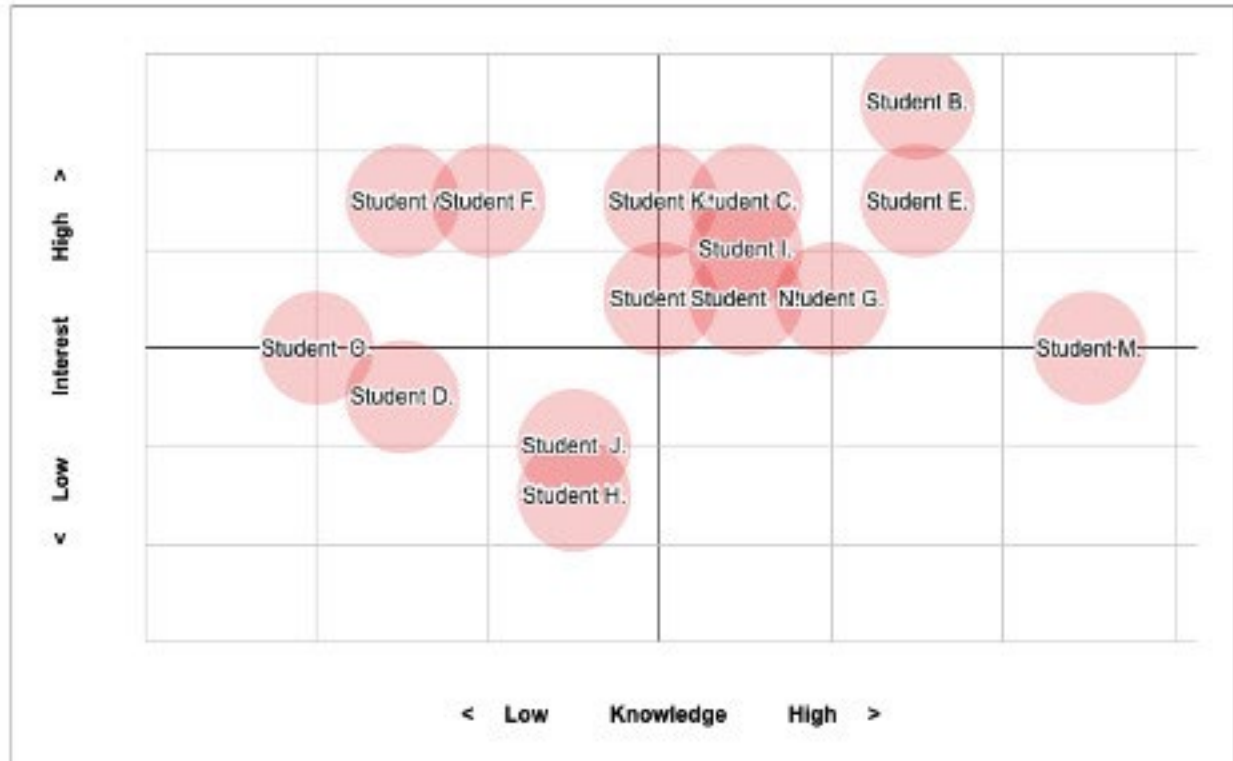
Figure 1.

A1	fx	First			
	A	B	C	D	
1	First	Last	Interest	Knowledge	
2	Student	A	8 ▾	2 ▾	
3	Student	B	10 ▾	8 ▾	
4	Student	C	8 ▾	6 ▾	
5	Student	D	4 ▾	2 ▾	
6	Student	E	8 ▾	8 ▾	
7	Student	F	8 ▾	3 ▾	
8	Student	G	6 ▾	7 ▾	
9	Student	H	2 ▾	4 ▾	
10	Student	I	7 ▾	6 ▾	
11	Student	J	3 ▾	4 ▾	
12	Student	K	8 ▾	5 ▾	
13	Student	L	6 ▾	5 ▾	
14	Student	M	5 ▾	10 ▾	
15	Student	N	6 ▾	6 ▾	
16	Student	O	5 ▾	1 ▾	
17			▾	▾	
18			▾	▾	
19			▾	▾	
20			▾	▾	

After each student selects their numbers, every student is then automatically plotted on a second sheet in the file. This replicates the students moving around the room with one click of a button.

Figure 2 depicts a simulated classroom visualization using the data entered by students in figure 1.

Figure 2.



Just like in the classroom version, the instructor should help initiate a conversation once the students have made their submissions. This has been facilitated in a live Zoom meeting, in the classroom with the visualization projected on the front screen, and using the chat function of an electronic meeting.

Pre/Post Conversation

Finally, this activity allows for a documented pre/post assessment. Regardless of the modality, record the student's responses on the google sheet. Collect the responses from the Google sheet visualization from the second tab for the pre-conversation. It is important to ensure that you collect the visual information from the pre-conversation activity.

The next step of the activity occurs during the delivery of the speeches. After each student has delivered their speech, the rest of the students revisit the Google sheet where they recorded their previous reactions to the topic. They should then change their answers based on

their new reactions to the topic. For instance, in the previous example, Student A listed their response as an “interest” of 8 and a “knowledge” of 2 for that topic. After the student of that topic has delivered their speech, Student A might feel that their interest has remained unchanged, but their knowledge is now greater and so would not change their interest response but change their knowledge response to a 5. Once all speeches are finished, collect the new responses for each student from the Google Sheets. It can be done by saving the file with students' names or taking a screenshot. The logistics can be selected by the instructor.

Pass out the responses from both the pre-and post-conversation to each speaker so they can see how effective their speech was overall. Group the students up with other students based on your objective for the activity. Instructors can pair the students with others that were interested and had large changes, pair them with students that had the opposite reaction intended (their response to the agreement reaction for the persuasive speech went down instead of up), etc. Allow the groups to discuss the reactions, ask questions, and gather in-person rationales for the reactions. This helps the students better understand how they communicate with different individuals and the impact their organization, words, and message might have on others.

Debrief

Students request to do this activity because it helps them visualize where their audience stands on speech topics. It helps them interact with those they will be speaking with. It helps answer questions and address concerns they had not considered. More importantly, this activity is functional in every type of course delivery option. The link to the Google sheet can be edited at any time for an asynchronous class. It can be edited simultaneously for a synchronous class. It provides a nice visual immediately for students to see. The activity allows students to narrow down outlines and subsequent content and focus on how much background information they may

need to give. It can also help them choose between speech topics if, for example, they receive feedback that the majority of the class already agrees with their persuasive thesis (thus there is nothing to convince them of) or is just not interested in an informative topic as presented.

Appraisal

Students ask for this activity for all of the speeches in the class because it allows for a very informal prompt to get to know each other a bit better. Students even ask to complete this activity after speeches to see the movement of their peers. Rather than sending out a survey or completely abandoning the audience analysis process altogether, the students become a part of the audience analysis process. They enjoy seeing where their peers stand (literally and figuratively) on the grid. Students often reference the conversation they had with members of the activity. They also begin to think about where a target audience is. They visualize that a target audience could potentially be a group of students grouped in a certain cluster on the grid rather than trying to message the entire audience. Despite our focus on audience, it is not uncommon for students to report that they did not understand the importance of considering your audience in shaping your message until they have had this visualization. Often they will report that they were focused on sharing the information that was most interesting or important to them, but the activity helped them to redefine their scope and prioritize the needs and wants of their audience while also recognizing it will ultimately result in a better performance from them as speakers.

It is also worth adding this activity helps students connect as mutual audience members and members of a learning community together. As they grow more comfortable and get to know each other, the activity also becomes a bit of a bonding experience which of the course helps facilitate future presentations and overall learning.

Challenges

Just like any activity that involves student participation, certain students will be reluctant to move across the spectrum and share their viewpoints on why they stood where they stood. Students are concerned about insulting the person sharing their topic because if they are “not interested” that could be interpreted poorly. Expectations should be made that not all of us know or are interested in the same topic and that honesty should be utilized to continue the open dialogue and learning process of audience analysis.

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