



Ideal Audience Exercise (45 minutes)
From Into the Good Dark Podcast
By Hunter Lee Hughes

The point of this exercise is to stimulate your imagination to consider and create an ideal audience member (or two). By the end of the process, you should have a sense of those who share your creative aspirations and taste! To see an application of this exercise in a video, visit: [YouTube.com/@Fatelink](https://www.youtube.com/@Fatelink)

To identify an ideal audience, perhaps it's worthwhile to consider your **default audience** - the group of people you unconsciously conjure when projecting an audience in your mind's eye while developing material.

For most creative people, the default audience relates to **family dynamics**. This is an irony, as often the creative type seeks expression through his work because his full, authentic self could not be actualized or expressed within the family dynamic. Winning over a default audience that includes reconfigured versions of the parental and sibling complexes provides the artist an opportunity to transcend the punishing limitations of family dynamics. **Perhaps, if the default audience appreciates his work, the artist will receive a raw version of the unconditional love and understanding he seeks from the family dynamic that is too challenging to navigate in "real life."** So, he endows the default audience with similar characteristics to his family of origin and hopes to dazzle, provoke or coax them into loving him (the artist) more deeply or finally fulfilling his unmet emotional and spiritual needs.

But, of course, by projecting the same sorts of limiting ideas and characteristics onto the default audience, the artist unconsciously forces himself to dance to the tune of the family dynamic that troubled him in real life. All too often, this means the intrinsic nature of the creative inner self will be shunted aside, in favor of modes of expression that relate to the family dynamic. **He'll either alter the quality of the creative output via self-censorship towards what is acceptable to the default audience or he'll react against the values and psychological complexes of the family dynamic with ferocity, taking the contrarian position through his work in order to free himself,** without entertaining and integrating the deeper sensibilities of the emerging artistic self. Sometimes, there is a clever mix of these two approaches.

While the tentacles of a damaged family dynamic are inevitably interwoven with creative output, it is the expression of an inner artistic self - untouched by damage - that can elevate the creative work beyond the merely personal. To enable the artistic dominance of this inner self, the formulation of an ideal audience through active imagination provides a tool to summon imagery, observations and experimental impulses from an artistic ethos that otherwise might be swept aside by the illusive desire to heal primal relationships by winning approval for creative work on terms dictated by the default audience.

So let's start by identifying the limiting ideas and characteristics of your default audience.



1. Think about the three most hypercritical family members, colleagues or close friends in your life when it comes to your creative work. These are people that, upon reflection, don't give your creative work a fair shake. Who are they? **Name them here.**

Critical Person #1:

Critical Person #2:

Critical Person #3:

2. What are the three best and worst qualities about each of the hypercritical people you name?

Critical Person #1

Best Qualities:

Worst Qualities:

Critical Person #2

Best Qualities:

Worst Qualities:

Critical Person #3

Best Qualities:

Worst Qualities:

Now, pull from the words you selected - both positive and negative - to paint a picture of the default audience.

Example: "I'd describe my default audience as consistent, dutiful, intelligent people with great analytical skills. But they are relatively superficial, myopic, and can be hostile to what they do not understand."

Note: you may be especially drawn to "win over" people/audiences that embody some of the good qualities of your default audience.

3. What are the recurring criticisms of your work from your hypercritical friends, family and colleagues? If they don't say their criticisms out loud, imagine what they might say. Usually, the phrases "too" and "not enough" are helpful here. For example, your work is "too loud" or there is "not enough humor/depth/intelligence" in your work.

Critical Person #1: Your work is just too _____. And, too _____. Too _____.

When I think about your creative work, I feel like there's not enough _____. Not enough _____. And, it's also not _____ enough.



Critical Person #2: Your work is just too _____. And, too _____. Too _____.

When I think about your creative work, I feel like there's not enough _____. Not enough _____. And, it's also not _____ enough.

Critical Person #3: Your work is just too _____. And, too _____. Too _____.

When I think about your creative work, I feel like there's not enough _____. Not enough _____. And, it's also not _____ enough.

Now that you've identified the ways in which your default audience may be conditioned against your work, consider the underlying relationships.

4. What are some of the primal elements that are missing in each of the relationships with your critical relatives/colleagues/friends? Fill in the blank.

With Critical Person #1, I just wish there was more _____, _____, and _____ in our relationship.

Let me explain:

With Critical Person #2, I just wish there was more _____, _____, and _____ in our relationship.

Let me explain:

With Critical Person #3, I just wish there was more _____, _____, and _____ in our relationship.

Let me explain:

After these exercises, I feel my relationship with my default audience is missing _____, _____, _____, and _____.

These are some of the driving, primal forces that you are likely seeking from the default audience as a replacement for what you did not/do not receive from these critical relationships in your life. Please note that these dynamics provide a backdrop to your conditioning for what you are seeking from a default audience and indicate ways that you may be tempted to people please or rebel from your default audience (neither people-pleasing nor reflexively adopting a contrarian position represent true freedom from the default audience).

Now that you know the conditioning that you're up against...how do we discover a more ideal audience? How do you find an ideal audience that is in better sync with your creative aspirations and taste?

The next portion of the exercise involves brainstorming. So go quickly and don't take too much time to analyze.

Name **FIVE** films that you love. Go fast! Don't think!

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

List **FIVE** plays you love. Brainstorm mode.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Name **FIVE** poems you love. Keep up that brainstorming vibe!

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

CIRCLE one selection from each of the three previous lists. Perhaps it's your favorite, perhaps it's the one you are most drawn to today, perhaps it's the selection you feel is most relevant to your ideal audience. Place the name of the circled selection into the center of a circle.

List qualities within the circle that you associate with the audience who would appreciate this film/play/poem as much as you do.



For my selected film, I wrote down words/phrases like: Loves Dancing, Embraces Sexuality, Wonders about Mortality, Flashy, Sees Aesthetics as Emanation of God, Creative Types, Creativity more important than morality. Member of dysfunctional family, Takes risks with health & career, takes pride in quality.

Repeat the process with your selected play.

Beyond the Horizon

By Eugene O'Neill

And then again with your selected poem.

Boil Nicely Now

By Rumi

Please note: if plays, poems or films do not resonate for you, you can use the same exercise with paintings, tv shows, novels, or any number of creative categories. Just be sure to select three categories that are different than one another.

You should now compile one list of audience qualities pulled from the three different categories. Based on associations with the film, play, and poem in the circles, my list might look something like this:

Loves Dancing	Expressive through Sexuality
Showbusiness person	Sophisticated
Urban-dweller	Experience with a a dysfunctional family
Stylish	Wonders about God
Interested in Mortality	Sees Suffering as a Pathway to personal and spiritual growth
Sense of Humor	Fatalistic
Fatalistic	Poetic Type
Understands sibling rivalry	Capable of Revelation
Stoic	Creativity more important than morality
Capable of Revelation	Takes risks with health & career

Now, you need to form two composite characters - one male and one female.

First, select five of the words and phrases on your cumulative list into an idea of a character. Try to include at least one word/phrases from each of the circles you created. Then, use an additional five words/phrases to form the basis for another character. Design one of the characters as male and the other character female.

Female Character

Loves Dancing
Disciplined
Stylish
Fatalistic
Capable of Revelation

Male Character

Urban-dweller
Wonders About God
Poetic Type
Understands Sibling Rivalry
Sense of Humor

Assign them a name and a backstory. If it helps you to fill out their backstory, try answering these questions about them. What is their profession? What are their strengths as a human being? What about weaknesses? What's one of their bad habits? What advice might this person give you? What advice might they give one of the people on your default audience list? Where is this person living? Describe their home and its decor.

For the name, you can use some combination of the titles, traits, and qualities you have discovered.

For example, my Female Character became **Madame Fosse-Rumiskaya**, retired dancer (elements of her name were pulled from each of my favorite film/play/poem)

The Male Character became **Eugene Sophomore**, philosophy student. His name was a combination of my favorite playwright along with the profession I assigned for this character.

Once you have described and named each of your ideal audience characters, go to a stock photo library and find an image that best represents each of them. Print out these images or save them to your computer as visual references.

To see the effect of your default audience vs. an ideal audience, **try a session of active imagination**. First, pitch a new idea about your creative project to an imaginary version of one of your three, hypercritical default audience members. To accomplish this, pull up a picture of the hypercritical person and set it before you. Then, ask them a question and answer that question in the voice/style of your hypercritical person.

For example, you might ask them: How do you like this new scene I've written?

Critical Person #1: Frankly, I was a little bored and confused by it.

You: What part of the scene confused you? (Then continue conversation).

Now, take that same idea and pitch it to one of your two imaginary ideal audience members. Using the image and backstory you created for these characters, ask the same question and see: what is their response? Are they more supportive? Insightful? Do any ideas come up based on their response?

For example, you might ask the ideal audience characters: How do you like this new scene I've written?

Madame Fosse-Rumiskaya: I love how we move into a completely different environment - the sculpture garden provides so many opportunities for interesting poses and body language from the actors.

Eugene Sophomore: It's promising, but could be a bit sexier. I think a young guy like that would dress differently for a date to an art museum. Maybe it's cute if they buy something that matches from the gift shop just before this scene.

Remember that your active imagination with a hypercritical, default audience may yield interesting and useful responses, just as your interaction with an ideal audience member might be empowering. Give all three "characters" a chance. See how relating to these energies changes and transforms your relationship to the creative process. The purpose is not to eliminate the hypercritical voices from your mind, but to augment them with expressions that embody your artistic taste and goals to facilitate great artistic choices.

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END EXERCISE

