



many people have little difficulty reading complex submissions to research journals because I have been reading them all my professional life. (Directions to our new widescreen TV are a very different matter.) So simple texts can be difficult, and complex texts can be easy—which is why reading-level formulas can only take us so far. The key is the ease or difficulty of taking on the role the writer has created for us. Are we invited guests or crashers? Or something in between?

As we read, **we are always crashing parties** that were not created for us.

As I see it, there are two major kinds of difficulty, and it is important to keep them straight. Let's call Difficulty **1 Bad Writing**. There's a lot of it out there. With bad writing, even the intended audience has trouble. It takes forever to get to the point; the writer overuses passive constructions; key terms or acronyms go unexplained. Often, the writer is too much in his or her own head. There is no selectivity in presenting the findings, as if each piece of data is precious and cannot be omitted. **We have death by information.**

Irritating as Difficulty 1 can be, it's not the type of problem most students face when they confront a difficult text. In most cases, the problem—Difficulty 2—is a deep unfamiliarity with the genre, conventions, vocabulary, and even the issues raised. Students are not part of the

reader's assumed
and his or her actual prior
the greatest source of

Or Difficult?

complexity begins to get
g problem. The recent
lenging texts is a positive
ough it seems to me the
ot complexity but diffi-
akes a text hard to read,
we do to help students?
if relatively "simple"
mple, some of William
is's poems—would be
lers with no experience
n poetry. And, although

boring
texts

bored
to death