In the paper, “Comments on Wettstein’s ‘Having in Mind’”, I present a number of ideas meant to critique Howard Wettstein’s interpretation of Keith Donnellan’s view of the referential use of definite descriptions. While you have not read the Wettstein paper or the Donnellan paper, there are still things of value to be recovered from the comment. These include the following four items.

1. The handout supplies a wealth of different ways to think about reference and referential relationships. The first set comprises conditions involving the audience, the relationship between a denotative condition and the referent, presupposition, and indirect discourse. The second set includes conditions and elements that relate to the cognitive background of reference, especially as it has to do with speaker intention. These derive from both Donnellan’s paper and Wettstein’s paper.

2. Wettstein’s paper argues for an interpretation of the referential use of definite descriptions that is in line with direct reference; specifically, it puts forward the idea that the description used referentially contributes its referent to the proposition expressed by the utterance. In my comment, I argue that this way of reading Donnellan does a disservice to the communicative, audience-focused view that he develops in his original paper. We have discussed the role of the audience in communication in this class, and it has been the focus of a couple of presentations; this comment continues to recommend that we take seriously the audience’s role in meaning making.

3. The comment raises the question of whether reference can be made out in terms of having the reference in mind. One way to cash this out is in terms of speaker intention, but that approach does not seem workable for a variety of reasons. The idea that having something in mind might make a difference to how we understand referential communication is appealing, but I suggest (hopefully provocatively) that the best way to make sense out of it is in terms of action and not in terms of mind.

4. The discussion of reference failure calls attention to the idea that the operative notion of reference in communication could be referring someone to something; if so, then that would once again play up the audience’s role in the semantics and pragmatics of natural language.