



Assignment: Rhetorical Analysis

College Composition • ENG 1030 • Fall 2024

1. BACKGROUND

By now, you have seen the benefits of reading rhetorically. Being able to read rhetorically helps you make decisions about what to do with things you read and how to interpret an author's ideas. With this assignment, you will demonstrate how well you understand the situation surrounding the writing other people do. You'll show your ability to look beyond the content of the text into the intentions of the author and the expectations of the audience. In a document written to your colleagues in class, **explain how understanding the rhetorical situation of your selected text changes how people use the text.** Be sure to identify the exigence and constraints of the situation, the affordances of the genre, the characteristics of the intended audience, and the qualifications and purpose of the rhetor.

Overall, this assignment develops your ability to:

- make inferences by reading a text on multiple levels;
- consider the constraints applied to, and the effect intended by, an author;
- separate rhetoric from content; and
- employ the specialized vocabulary of writing studies to discuss rhetorical situations.

2. PROCEDURE

Your first task is to select a text to analyze. Be sure to choose a text that does more than merely inform an audience. If you are unsure if a text makes a good choice, consider starting with two related texts and deciding which works best further through this process.

- (1) Make a list, identifying each of these elements of the rhetorical situation in which this text was created: exigence, purpose, rhetor, audience, genre, affordances, constraints
- (2) Get more specific. For each item on your list, include a description that is more like a sentence and less like a name. For instance, a rhetor could be, "Walt Mossberg." But a more relevant and helpful entry in this list would be, "Walt Mossberg, former principal technology columnist for The Wall Street Journal for twenty-two years and creator of the modern technology-product review. His decades of experience writing about consumer products makes him an authority when evaluating this latest product launch."
- (3) Think about how the items in your list influence each other. These questions are hard, and the answers will be complex. That complexity will give you plenty to write about!
Example questions to consider:
 - (a) How does the intended audience influence the rhetor's choice of genre?
 - (b) How does the rhetor use the affordances of the genre to successfully influence the audience?
 - (c) Why is the rhetor you identified qualified to respond to the exigence you listed?
 - (d) Where do the constraints you listed come from? Are they the product of the genre, the audience, both, or something else in the situation?

- (4) Now that you have a sophisticated, detailed understanding of the rhetorical situation surrounding the text you selected, explain that situation to your classmates. Create a document you could hand to a colleague that would help them understand what the text you picked does in the world.

3. EVALUATION

Your task for this assignment is to explain a selected text's rhetorical situation to a colleague familiar with the discourse of writing studies but unfamiliar with the text you're discussing or the situation surrounding its use. Your work will be assessed using the evaluation criteria presented below.

TABLE 1. Rhetorical Analysis Rubric

	INTENTION	ANALYSIS	INSIGHTS
Exceptional	Paper enhances colleagues' understanding of rhetorical situations and the function of texts in use.	Analysis is sophisticated and integrated, clearly showing interrelation among discussed rhetorical constituents.	Skillful analysis holds greater value by helping interpret or understand the use of writing in a larger context.
Successful	Author fluidly expresses the purpose of performing this rhetorical analysis.	Document clearly explains each component of the rhetorical situation appropriately for the intended audience.	Author ensures the reader "gets" the situation surrounding the chosen text (not just its content).
Falls Short	Unclear reason or context for the analysis.	Analysis is incomplete or inaccurate; work focuses on content or meaning, not use.	Text focuses more on listing characteristics than on ensuring audience understanding.