

CHAPTER 2: The Rhetorical Situation—Understanding Audience and Context

1. What are the five elements in the rhetorical situation? Use TRACE to help you remember.

Elements of the rhetorical situation are:

- Text
- Reader
- Author
- Constraints
- Exigence

2. How can a reader use the rhetorical situation to analyze an argumentative essay?

A reader may use the five parts of the rhetorical situation (TRACE) to analyze an argumentative essay:

- Text—to determine the kind of text and any special qualities and features
- Reader (or audience)—to determine the targeted audience and its nature
- Author—to attempt to discover the background and motivation of the author
- Constraints—to determine constraining circumstances that might influence the responses of the reader and the author to the subject
- Exigence—to discover the motivation and context for the argument

How can you use the rhetorical situation to analyze an image?

A viewer may use the five parts of the rhetorical situation (TRACE) to analyze an image.

- Text—to determine the type of image and its special qualities and features
- Viewer or audience—to determine the nature of the original, target audience, as well as other audiences and the possible interpretations of the image that these audiences might make
- Photographer or artist—to identify the person who created the image, along with an understanding of this person's interests, motives, and types of work
- Constraints—to infer the artist's values and interests and to compare them with the viewer's to ascertain the potential for common ground
- Exigence—to understand the context for the image and what motivated the artist to make this visual statement

How can you use the rhetorical situation during the planning phase of writing a paper?

The five parts of the rhetorical situation can help the writer get started:

- Exigence provides the author's motivation for writing on a particular issue;
- Audience encourages the writer to consider who will read the argument and if the author and the audience share enough common ground;
- Constraints identify value systems, experiences, and affiliations that can either bring author and audience together or drive them apart;
- Author encourages students to think about their interest in the topic, what they already know, and what they still need to learn;
- Text includes understanding the assignment and selecting strategies to produce a paper that meets its requirements.

3. Why is the audience important in argument? What types of positions might an audience initially hold? What possible outcomes are associated with argument directed to each of these audiences?

The purpose of argument is to bring about some change in the audience. In order to do that, a writer needs to analyze the audience's present opinions, values, and motives and show as often as possible that the author shares common ground with the audience. A friendly audience may become more convinced; a mildly friendly or mildly hostile audience may decide to agree, take a new interest in the issue, or tentatively accept the arguer's position; a neutral audience may change its level of indifference, and a hostile audience may lower its hostility and listen.

4. What is a discourse community?

A discourse community is a specialized group that shares subject matter, background, experience, values, and a common language (including specialized and technical vocabulary, jargon or slang).

To what discourse communities do you belong?

Answers will vary and may include sorority, fraternity, college major, professional group, family, ethnic group, etc.

How does a discourse community help establish common ground for its members?

Common ground automatically exists because they speak a common language, share similar interests and values, and understand one another easily.

5. What is the universal audience?

The universal audience is a composite audience imagined by the audience that has individual differences but also important common qualities. Every arguer constructs the universal audience from his or her own past experiences, so the concept of the universal audience varies somewhat from individual to individual and culture to culture.

What are its special qualities?

The universal audience is educated, reasonable, normal, adult, and willing to listen.

Why is it a useful idea?

The concept of the universal audience is helpful when the audience is largely unknown and you cannot find much information about it. Imagining the audience as educated, reasonable, etc. improves the quality and style of the argument. It is also useful to try to construct an unfamiliar audience's possible initial position on your issue. When you don't know your audience's position, it is best to imagine it as either neutral or mildly opposed to your views and direct your argument with that in mind.