



Considering the Rhetorical Situation

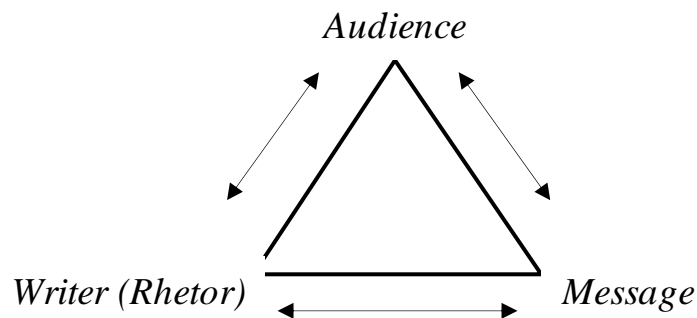
What is the Rhetorical Situation?

Lloyd Bitzer argues that “rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation” (qtd. in Grant-Davie 105) while Richard Vatz “contends that situations do not exist without rhetors, and that rhetors create rather than discover rhetorical situations” (Grant-Davie 105). Still Scott Consigny claims rhetorical situations happen both ways!

What is important is that we, as rhetors, consider who are audience and what their relationship is to the issue we discuss.

Why is the Rhetorical Situation important?

You will do a lot of writing throughout the various courses you take as an undergraduate student. Therefore, when you consider the various situations in which you write and the diverse audiences for whom you write, the diagram below may help you begin to shape your texts.



In the Rhetorical Triangle Diagram above, the arrows indicate that the relationships among the writer, the reader, and the message are dynamic. Thus, the writer affects the reader, but the intended reader also affects some of the choices writers make while writing. The reader may be influenced by the message, yet the reader’s perceptions and experiences interact with the message. The writer determines the message even as the message helps to determine how the writer delivers it.

Consider the following questions to determine how many different purposes and audiences there may be for writing in each situation:

- How many variations may there be in writing about a decision to become a vegetarian?
- How would you describe your experiences with fraternities or sororities to a fifth grader, a classmate, future student, your parents?
- How would writing about crime in Utica for a letter to *The Factory Times* differ from writing a report about crime in Utica for a sociology course?
- What are the chances your résumé will be considered favorably in your application for a job if you are unaware that most employers expect such documents to be free of all spelling, grammar, and formatting errors?

Writing is both personal and social; therefore, effective writing makes the writer's message clear to the reader. Successful writers analyze the situations in which they write to anticipate and address their readers' needs and expectations. Effective writers determine the most suitable form for successful writing in a particular situation.

Works Cited

Grant-Davie, Keith. "Rhetorical Situations and Their Constituents." *Writing About Writing: A College Reader*, edited by Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs, Bedford/St. Martins, 2011, pp. 101-118.