

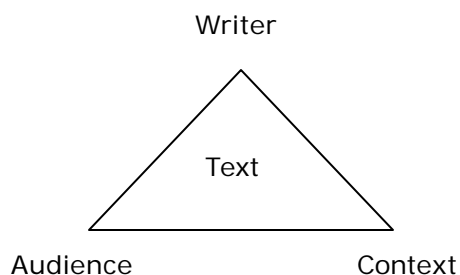
## Rhetorical Analysis

Every text—oral, written, or visual—is, in some sense rhetorical; each one is a strategic presentation of particular ideas. Human beings both produce and receive such texts; as such, we must understand what they mean. Typically, this is done implicitly; we understand the meaning of a text without thinking about how or why it works the way it does.

Rhetorical analysis asks us precisely that: to understand how texts create meaning, how they construct knowledge, and how they make us take action. Rhetorical analysis, then, helps us to understand explicitly (rather than simply implicitly, as most of us do) how the language of a text works and how we can use such language to work for us.

### Rhetorical Triangle

Simply put, rhetorical analysis is using the principles of rhetoric to make sense of how and why a given text works the way it does, to make sense of how and why it creates meaning. The simplest form of rhetorical analysis is using what is called **the rhetorical triangle**.



Using the rhetorical triangle, ask the following questions: Who is the writer and what type of writer is he or she? What stance is he or she taking? What are his or her beliefs, values, and assumptions? What is the text's message? How is it constructed? How does it text create meaning? How are these meanings influenced by the writer? To whom is the writer writing? Why? What is the purpose for writing? In what historical context was the text written? How does the context affect the text's meaning?

### Rhetorical Situation

Another simple form of rhetorical analysis looks heavily at two corners of the rhetorical triangle, audience and context. It is called **the rhetorical situation**. Using the rhetorical situation, ask the following questions: First, what is the exigency for this text? In other words, if the text is an effect, what is its cause? What need or urgency is it responding to? Second, who is the audience for this text? Why is the writer addressing this audience? Through what means? To what end? Finally, what are the constraints that the writer must deal with? What types of arguments are available to him or her? What can he or she say? What can't he or she say?

### The Canons of Rhetoric

The fullest form of rhetorical analysis is to go through **the canons of rhetoric** and using them as a heuristic. This is why learning the terminology of rhetoric can be so powerful.

- **Style (aka Language):** The basics of style are word choice, figurative language (tropes and figures), sentence structure and rhythm, and paragraphing. Hence, ask why these words or this language was used and not some other? Regardless of

intention, words and language have an effect on us. Also look to how sentences and paragraphs are structured. Why are they structured in this way and not some other? What is the effect of the way they are structured?

- **Arrangement (aka Organization or Structure):** What is the overall structure of the text? How is it arranged? Which parts (introduction, narration, confirmation, refutation, conclusion, etc.) are included? Which parts are excluded? What is the logic of its order? More pointedly, how does this structure create and/or constrain the text's meanings? How does it shape the text and its argument? Given this structure, what meanings are possible? What ones are impossible?
- **Invention (aka Argument):**
  - **Definition:** What are the text's keywords? Are they defined? If so, how? If not, then why not? Where are these keywords located in the text? What is their frequency? And what role do they play in the text and its argument?
  - **Stasis Theory**
  - **Enthymemes and Examples:** There are two forms of argument in rhetoric, one based on deduction and the other on induction. For the former, examine the logic of the argument. What do you think of the propositions? Given that an enthymeme always deals with unspoken beliefs, values, and assumptions, what are they and what do you think of them? For the latter, what do you think of the analogy between the example and the argument the writer is trying to make?
  - **Common and Special Topics**
  - **Artistic Appeals (aka Intrinsic Proof):** According to Aristotle, there are three artistic appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos. The first deals with the writer and his or her character; the second with the audience and their emotions; and the third with the actual argument. Examine each closely.
  - **Inartistic Appeals (aka Extrinsic Proof):** While much of rhetoric deals with intrinsic proof, we also use outside sources: expert testimony and data, for example. With experts, look for lack of consensus and alternative testimony. With both testimony and data, what views have they ignored?
- **Ideology:** Beliefs, ideas, values, assumptions, and interpretations shape what we say and what can be said. The goal of ideological analysis is to identify the beliefs, values, assumptions, etc. that are contained in a text and examine their role in shaping that text, with a particular watchful eye for dominant ideologies and the silencing of alternative ideologies. Questions that might be asked are: What is the dominant ideology of the text? What values and beliefs does the text promote? How do the beliefs and values shape the argument and limit or expand the rhetorical strategies available to the writer? Are rhetorical strategies used to discourage the questioning of the beliefs and assumptions of the text? How do the beliefs and assumptions determine what is legitimate and what is not? Does the text normalize these beliefs, values, assumptions, and what rhetorical strategies are used to do so?