

Considering the Rhetorical Situation

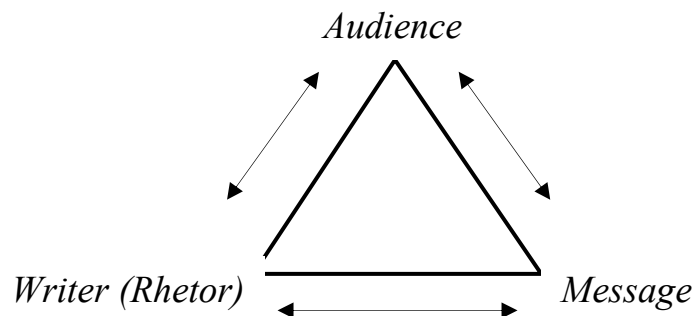
What is the Rhetorical Situation?

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 (writers), consider who the audience is and what their relationship is to the issue we discuss.

Why is the Rhetorical Situation important?

Students will do a lot of writing throughout the various courses they take; therefore, when considering the various situations and diverse audiences for whom writers write, the diagram below may help students begin to shape their 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. These may be called “constraints” the writer faces. 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 constraints may exist for writers and (audiences) in each situation:

- How many variations may there be in writing about the decision to become a vegetarian?
- How would a college student describe experiences with fraternities or sororities to a fifth grader, a classmate, future student, or your parents?
- How would writing about crime in Gainesville for a letter to *The Independent Florida Alligator* differ from writing a report about crime in Gainesville for a sociology course?

Writing is both personal and social; therefore, strategic writing presents clear messages to the reader. Successful writers analyze the situations in which they write to anticipate and address their readers' constraints, needs, and expectations.

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.