

# Four Main Steps on How to do a Rhetorical Analysis of a Speech

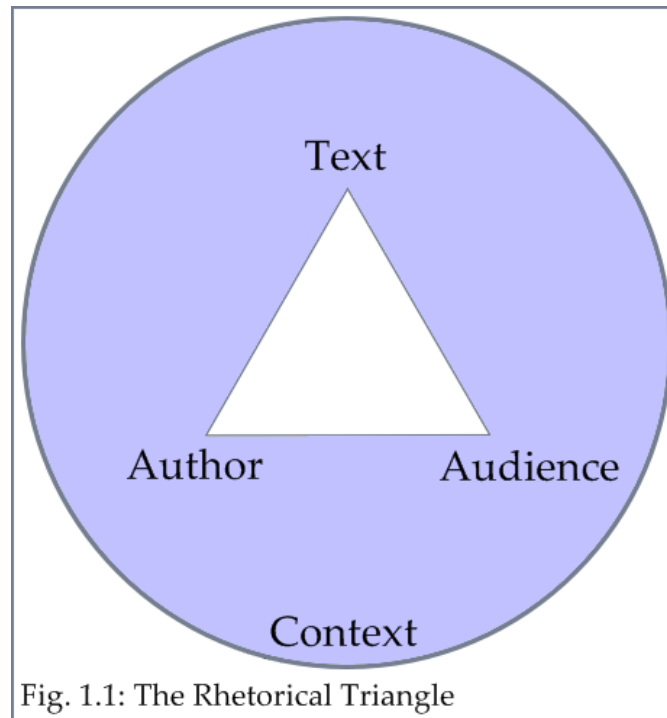


Fig. 1.1: The Rhetorical Triangle

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# 1. Context

- **WHAT IS THE RHETORICAL SITUATION?**
  - **What specific occasion gives rise to the need or opportunity for persuasion?**
  - **What is the historical context that would give rise to the composition of this text?**

## 2. Author

- **WHO IS THE AUTHOR/SPEAKER?**
  - How does he or she establish credibility?
  - Does he/she come across as knowledgeable? Fair? Something else?
  - Does the speaker's reputation convey a certain authority?
- **WHAT IS HIS/HER INTENTION IN SPEAKING?**
  - To attack or defend?
  - To spark action or dissuade from certain action?
  - To praise or blame?
  - To explain? To inform? To anger? Persuade? Amuse? Motivate? Sadden? Ridicule? Anger?
  - Is there more than one purpose? Does the purpose shift at all throughout the text?

# 3. Audience

- **WHO MAKE UP THE AUDIENCE?**
  - **Who is the intended audience?**
  - **What values does the audience hold that the author or speaker appeals to?**

# 4. Text

- **WHAT IS THE CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE?**
  - Can you summarize the main idea? What is the author's "thesis"?
  - What are the principal lines of reasoning or kinds of arguments used?
- **HOW DOES THE AUTHOR ENGAGE APPEALS?**
  - Does/how does the author or speaker appeal to logic? To emotion? To ethics? To authority?

# 4. Continued

- **WHAT IS THE FORM IN WHICH THE MESSAGE IS CONVEYED?**
  - **Overall Structure**
    - What is the structure of the communication; how is it arranged? Why does the author order his/her points the way they are ordered?
    - Is the text unified and coherent? Are there adequate transitions? How do the transitions work?
  - **Style/Tone**
    - What kind of style and tone is used and for what purpose?

# 4. Continued

## – Language

- **What figures of speech and figurative language are used? Are devices of comparison used to convey or enhance meaning? Which tropes--similes, metaphors, personification, hyperbole, etc. does the writer use? When does he/she use them? Why?**
- **How does the writer use diction? Is it formal? Informal? Technical? Jargon? Slang? the language emotionally evocative? Does the language change throughout the piece? How does the language contribute to the writers' aim?**
- **Does the writer use dialogue? Quotations? To what effect?**
- **Are important terms repeated throughout the text? Why?**
- **Are there any particularly vivid images that stand out? What effect do these images have on the writers' purpose?**

# 4. Continued

## – Sentences

- **Is there anything unusual in the writers' use of punctuation? What punctuation or other techniques of emphasis (italics, capitals, underlining, ellipses, parentheses) does the writer use? Is punctuation over- or under used? Which marks does the writer use when, and for what effects? Dashes to create a hasty breathlessness? Semi-colons for balance or contrast?**
- **What is the sentence structure like in the text? Does the writer use fragments or run-ons? Imperative ("Do this")? Interrogative ("Why don't we do this")? Exclamatory ("We need to do this!")? Are they simple? Compound? Complex? Short? Long? Parallel? Are there any patterns in the sentence structure? Can you make any connections between the patterns and the writers' purpose?**



# 4. Continued

- **HOW DO FORM AND CONTENT CORRESPOND?**
  - Does the form complement the content?
  - What effect could the form have, and does this aid or hinder the author's intention?