

Rhetorical Situation

Definition

Rhetorical situation is a term coined by Professor Lloyd Bitzer to describe the elements that combine to constitute a communication situation.

The rhetorical situation includes the following concepts:

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| Situation | What's going on |
| Purpose | Why is it happening |
| Exigence | The burden or action requiring attention because of the situation |
| Audience | Who's involved, what is their role in what's happening, and what is the significance of that role |
| Constraints | Limitations or opportunities that influence how an audience might respond |
| Reflection | What does the situation mean and why is it important |

Before you even begin to write, you need to consider and be able to articulate what the rhetorical situation is (*By the way: When I use the word consider, I mean more than simply sitting there thinking about something silently to yourself. I mean working through the concepts practically through an explicit activity such as writing, or completing the Project Planning Form or the Audience Analysis Worksheet.*)

Audience Analysis

Demographic factors affecting reading comprehension

- Age, gender
- International or ethnic identity
- Educational level
- Values and beliefs
- Political positions
- Economic levels
- Reading style/graphic style
- Affinity to a group

Four Key Facts about How Readers and Listeners Absorb Information

- An audience creates meaning bit by bit and reacts moment by moment.
- An audience is influenced by its surroundings beliefs and value, prior experiences, and roles and responsibility.
- An audience has finite resources for comprehension.
The energy that it takes to focus, to decipher language or symbols reduces the ability to comprehend.
- An audience absorbs information visually as well as textually.

Technical Level: Purposes in Reading

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| <p>Experts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a general expertise • Extensive knowledge of a field but may be unfamiliar with specific details in a subspecialty <p>Specific Experts Have extensive knowledge of a field and specific knowledge about a subspecialty</p> | <p>When experts read a document, they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining and expanding their expertise. • Evaluating a document's validity or credibility. • Obtaining specific answer for their research interests. |
| <p>Technicians and Support Staff People who construct, operate, and fix objects and systems.</p> | <p>When technicians and other support staff read a document, they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning how to perform a task • Learning how to solve a problem. • Learning about new devices and procedures. • Absorbing knowledge helpful to their tasks. |
| <p>Decision-makers and Managers People who makes choices, implement plans, administer budgets, manage resources and people.</p> | <p>When decision-makers and managers read a document, they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a decision. • Assessing the current situation. • Maintaining their level of expertise. • Evaluating projects and employees. |
| <p>Laypeople People who don't have the specific knowledge of an expert or technician. Having limited knowledge of a specific subject, however, does not mean they are stupid.</p> | <p>When laypeople read a document, they are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making decisions as citizens, consumers, and investors. • Learning how to do something. • Expanding general knowledge. • Becoming an expert. |