

Activity 16: Taking a Stance: Elements of the Rhetorical Framework

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Explain to students that the rhetorical framework is the “Frame” for the key elements of the writing situation. The following terms should help students think about the context that surrounds the writing they will generate for this essay.

Students are developing and strengthening their writing by analyzing specific contexts for the writing situation. This analysis leads to a more informed writing stance for the writer as he or she moves into the drafting stage.

Using the “rhetorical framework” guide to lead discussion read each section and ask students if they have any questions. Establishing the purpose and function of the rhetorical framework may involve some whole class practice.

Students may also benefit from a guided response in which you cover one aspect of the framework and then give them time to write about it before moving on to the next concept.

Students benefit from writing about their writing. Considering aspects of the writing situation such as purpose and audience leads to a more specific understanding of the contexts that surround the writing, which, in turn, influence the way writers decide what goes in their writing (selection) and how things may be organized in their writing (arrangement).

1. **PURPOSE:** Identifying the purpose of your writing means that you are able to say what you are trying to do to an audience through your writing. What effect do you want your writing to have on the reader?

Here are some questions you can use to figure out your purpose:

- What am I trying to accomplish in this essay?
- What is it I want my readers to experience when they read my essay?
- What do I want this audience to understand as a result of reading my writing?

Here are some things to remember about purpose

- Sometimes purpose isn't clear until after you have done some writing.
- Purpose is always related to your sense of audience.
- Sometimes analyzing audience in detail helps you figure out purpose.
- Sometimes writing about purpose before you draft your response can help you find a thesis, or a structure, or a plan.
- Your sense of purpose can change as you move toward your final draft and understand more about what you are writing.

2. **AUDIENCE:** Identifying audience and analyzing audience helps you develop a clearer understanding of your purpose. Your knowledge about audience functions as an important guide to you when you are trying to decide what to put in your essay and how you are going to sequence information in your essay.

Here are some questions to ask about audience:

- What do they know about my topic?
- What do I want them to know about my topic and my message?
- Why interests do they have in my topic?
- Why do they need to read my writing?
- What does my audience believe about the topic?
- What makes my audience a group, or a community?

Here are some things to remember about audience analysis:

- Be specific as you take inventory of their interests, their knowledge, their sources, their agenda, and their world-view.
- Try to summarize their argument, or the ideas they contribute to the conversation about your topic
- Be aware of the language and knowledge the audience favors: what kind of facts do they like, what sort of values do they insist upon, what are their expectations?

- Remember that your writing moves from a kind of internal focus (where you are writing more to yourself) out to a specific focus on audience (where you are focused on how your writing affects the reader). How is your writing supporting a shared understanding of what you want to communicate?
3. **3. SITUATION:** Understanding the situation in which you are producing writing helps you understand the kind of rules you need to follow, or the genre conventions that are most important to your writing. We always write in a specific context, understanding how the writing takes place in a particular context helps you understand what you need to show through your writing. For example, you may write to simply summarize a reading for yourself, or you may write to prove to the teacher that you have read something well; these two scenarios constitute two different writing situations and call for different processes and different products. Thus the context, or situation, of the writing will influence the way you perform the writing.

Here are some questions that will help you analyze the writing situation:

- What does this writing have to do with my current situation as a writer/student?
- How does my writing relate to what others have written?
- How does my writing relate to the curriculum in my class?
- How does my writing relate to other work in the class?
- For whom am I writing?
- Am I supposed to demonstrate anything through this writing?
- What in this situation has prompted me to choose my topic?

Here are some things to remember about the value of analyzing situation

- Understanding situation helps you develop a clearer sense of purpose.
 - Knowing the context for your writing helps you develop better ideas for the writing, allowing you to write in relation to some other ideas; it helps with topic selection, with research, with composing, and revision. You need information about the situation of the writing to be able to make key decisions about both the content and the sequence of information you use.
 - Analyzing audience helps you understand the influence situation has on your writing choices.
4. **PERSONA/ETHOS:** This simply refers to the way you are representing yourself in the writing. As people who write, we have lots of ways of presenting ourselves, sometimes as experts on family, sometimes as experts on law, sometimes as someone searching for truth, there are an infinite number of ways we present our identity through writing. Ethos refers to the way you build credibility through your writing. It is about the way people read “YOU” in the writing and learn to trust what you are telling them. Ethos is the way you represent yourself in the writing in order to gain trust from the reader.

Here are some questions to ask about ethos:

- What impression do I want to make on the reader?
- What tone of voice do I want to use?
- Who am I speaking for when I write?
- Am I part of a larger community when I write?
- How can I let the reader experience my competence?

Here are some things to remember about ethos

- Readers will pay attention to the language you use in making a judgment about your credibility
 - Readers will notice the kind of examples you use as those examples say something about your level of engagement with the topic, or your expertise, or how much research you have done.
 - Readers will notice how well you explain things. Your ideas find their clearest expression in your explanations. The more developed your explanations about the truth-value of your claims, the more credibility you have with the reader.
 - Readers will detect inaccuracy or lack of engagement with a topic
5. **MESSAGE:** In its most elemental form, message is made of the thing you want to say about a particular topic, event, or idea. It is the controlling idea of the essay. Message is the product of your thinking about purpose and audience: it is what you want to say to the reader, or the point you want to get across. It is you're most dominant claim.

Here are some questions to ask about message:

- Can I summarize the main point of my essay in a short paragraph?
- Does my message support the purpose of my writing?
- Does all the evidence and explanation I use in my writing relate to my message?
- Does the audience need to hear my message?
- Is my message meaningful?
- Is my message self-evident?
- What happens when I apply the "So what?" question to my writing?

Here are some things to remember about message

- Remember to ask the age-old question about your writing: SO WHAT?
- Message is often not discovered until after you have done quite a bit of writing
- Another way to think of message is as the largest claim of the writing.
- Remember that we pass along a lot of messages in our writing, but in academic writing, one message seems to prevail as the most important message.

Journal-Now that you have considered the "rhetorical framework" for your writing, develop a set of instructions for yourself about how you will use this information in your first draft.