

# Basic Questions for Rhetorical Analysis

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## **What is the rhetorical situation?**

- What occasion gives rise to the need or opportunity for persuasion?
- What is the historical occasion that would give rise to the composition of this text?

## **Who is the author/speaker?**

- How does he or she establish ethos (personal credibility)?
- Does he/she come across as knowledgeable? fair?
- Does the speaker's reputation convey a certain authority?

## **What is his/her intention in speaking?**

- To attack or defend?
- To exhort or dissuade from certain action?
- To praise or blame?
- To teach, to delight, or to persuade?

## **Who make up the audience?**

- Who is the intended audience?
- What values does the audience hold that the author or speaker appeals to?
- Who have been or might be secondary audiences?
- If this is a work of fiction, what is the nature of the audience within the fiction?

## **What is the content of the message?**

- Can you summarize the main idea?
- What are the principal lines of reasoning or kinds of arguments used?
- What topics of invention are employed?
- How does the author or speaker appeal to reason? to emotion?

## **What is the form in which it is conveyed?**

- What is the structure of the communication; how is it arranged?

- What oral or literary genre is it following?
- What figures of speech (schemes and tropes) are used?
- What kind of style and tone is used and for what purpose?

### **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?

### **Does the message/speech/text succeed in fulfilling the author's or speaker's intentions?**

- For whom?
- Does the author/speaker effectively fit his/her message to the circumstances, times, and audience?
- Can you identify the responses of historical or contemporary audiences?

### **What does the nature of the communication reveal about the culture that produced it?**

- What kinds of values or customs would the people have that would produce this?
- How do the allusions, historical references, or kinds of words used place this in a certain time and location?



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