

- analyzing
n you were
- ical principles more
- ne piece (such as
of writing it, to the
- aspects of the rhetorical situation that shaped it)
- Evidence that you understand how rhetorical situations constrain writing
(in the broad sense of *constrain* that Grant-Davie offers)

RHETORICAL READING ANALYSIS: RECONSTRUCTING A TEXT'S CONTEXT, EXIGENCE, MOTIVATIONS, AND AIMS

This assignment asks you to practice the rhetorical reading strategies that Haas and Flower describe in "Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning" (p. 559). As a college writer, you need to make rhetorical reading a normal habit. To read texts rhetorically is to read them as if they're people talking to you, people with motivations that may not always be explicit but are always present. It means talking about not only what a text says or what it means, but what it does. (Start a war? Make a friend smile? Throw down a gauntlet? Refocus everyone's attention? Woo a lover?) When you read a text trying to figure out what it does or why a person would go to the trouble of writing it, you're reading rhetorically.

For this rhetorical reading project, the object of your analysis will be a scholarly journal article or book chapter. Working in this genre will give you important additional practice for reading scholarly work rhetorically in your later classes, and you'll probably have a lot to learn about how scholarly communities work in order to do the assignment well. Your task is to rhetorically read a text and compose a four- to five-page piece that explains your interpretation of what the writer meant the text to accomplish, and why.

Select a Text Your instructor might simply have you use any of the scholarly articles in this book (or choose from a smaller group of them). Or, you might be required to find a scholarly article of your own, either in writing and rhetoric studies, or in your major. You'll probably be more engaged in the project if the subject is of interest to you, so be sure that if you're choosing an article from this book or in the field of writing studies, you pick one that takes up an issue relating to writing (or rhetoric or literacy) that you care about. The only functional constraint on your choice of article is that you *must* be able to trace its provenance — to know where it was first published, and when, and by whom.

Summarize the Text The first rule of rhetorical reading is, *read*. You need to get a sufficient handle on the text you've chosen to be able to write a summary of it in about a page. Look for these aspects of the text in building your summary:

- The territory the text covers, and the niche it occupies, which may be its research questions or its thesis, if you can identify one. (You might try identifying and labeling these aspects with Assist Tags like we do in this book; see pp. 58–59 for descriptions of the tags.)
- The text's main parts or sections
- The main lines of argument in the piece
- Its theoretical framework — what underlying theories or principles it uses to study or interpret whatever it's focused on
- Any research methods the writer used
- Any findings or discoveries the writer reports
- The writer's discussion of the implications of their work (which will be mostly in the conclusion and potentially in the introduction as well)

When you summarize these aspects of the text, you're creating an account of what the writer *talked about* in the piece — generally speaking, you're trying to gather up what they said. This isn't a full account of the text yet, but you can't figure out what the text *means* or what it *does* if you don't know what it *says*.

Historize the Text Along with summarizing what the text says, you'll need to collect some basic information on the text's provenance. This information is crucial to rhetorical reading because it will help you make inferences later about the exigence and motives that gave birth to the text, helping you understand what it was meant to do, and what needs doing so would meet. Most of this information is *contextual*, meaning that it lies *with* but *outside* of the text. Here are things you need to know in order to give a good rhetorical reading of your text:

- Who wrote it?* You can probably find some basic author information published with the article itself, although sometimes biographies are not provided. In either case, to dig deeper, use your research and Google skills (and potentially consult Wikipedia).
- Who published it?* What journal or book did it originally appear in, and who publishes that journal or book? What can you learn about that publisher? What kinds of work do they usually publish, and what is the purpose of the journal or book it appeared in? (You'll be looking for the journal's own web page, or the book publisher's catalog, in order to address such questions.)

- *Who reads what this publisher prints?* Often, student readers believe that a text was written with them as the intended audience simply because they're reading the piece. You can avoid this misinterpretation by finding out who a given journal or publisher expects to be reading its work. Most journals' "About" pages will describe their intended readership.
- *When was the text written?* Particularly for writing on scientific or technical subjects, it is imperative to know *when* the writing happened. That information tells you two things: (1) What the writer could and could not have known at that point (given what had been discovered in the field at that time), and (2) where on both a field's and a broader culture's "timeline" a given piece fits — whether it was written during a particular conversation the field or a society was having, or sometime before or after that.

We call this research *historicizing* your text because what you are doing by asking these questions is building your sense of the text's history — how it fit in a particular rhetorical ecology, that web of rhetors, circumstances, events, and material objects that would have originally given rise to the text to begin with. Effective rhetorical reading is impossible without such historicizing.

Write Your Interpretation of the Text's Context, Exigence, Motivations, and Aims The thesis of your rhetorical reading analysis should have to do with *what the article does* (or did at the time) and *why the writer wanted it to do that*. The final step of your project is creating your interpretation of the text's history, and what it says, in order to make these assertions about the exigence, motivations, and aims that fueled the text given the context in which it was written.

While there is no set organization that will work best for all versions of this project, we do know a variety of functions your analysis will need to accomplish in some way in the piece. These functions are in the following list, which is not arranged in a particular order and which you shouldn't try to treat as a map of your analysis.

- Discuss the article's *context*: where and when it appeared, what the historical moment in the field was, and pertinent information about the writer and publisher.
- Discuss the *conversation* in which the article participates: It may be helpful to use Swales's CARS terms of "territory" and "niche" to assist this discussion. (See the summary of his framework on p. 29.)
- Summarize what the article says: Incorporate the short (approximately one-page) summary that you created after reading the article.
- Consider the writer's main *argument*: their central claim, their support for that claim, and, importantly, any major warrants that readers must agree with in order to build adherence with the argument. (If any of this language is confusing to you, read or reread Downs, p. 457.)

- Draw conclusions about the *exigence, motivations, and aims* of the text: What was this text *meant* to accomplish, and why? How do what it says and what it means relate to what the text actually does or accomplishes?
- Offer *evidence* for your interpretations: When you make a claim about the text or its context, what evidence do you have to support that claim? It could be quotations from the text, or information from external sources that you've found in your research to historicize the text.

An analysis that accomplishes each of these functions should, if it's well organized, be both an interesting rhetorical reading of your article and highly informative for the reader of your analysis. Most importantly, it will be an excellent example of rhetorical reading.

What Makes It Good?

- The main point of your rhetorical reading analysis should be what the text does and why the author meant it to do that.
- Your analysis needs to summarize the text you're interpreting.
- Your analysis has to talk about the context in which the text appeared.
- Your analysis should be organized and include an introduction and conclusion.
- Your analysis should include textual evidence for your claims.

MAPPING A RHETORICAL ECOLOGY

Ecology-mapping helps you trace the elements in a rhetorical ecology to see how they form an interconnected network — a web from which a rhetorical interaction emerges not just by the rhetor's own intention but by the "intentions" of everything and everyone else in the network as well. We want you to get used to this way of seeing rhetorical interactions and their roots.

Review Downs's explanation of rhetorical ecology (p. 466) before starting this project.

Choosing the Interaction Choose the rhetorical interaction whose ecology you want to map carefully, because we want a map, not an atlas. You're looking for an interaction between a small number of people in a small time and place. Trying to map the ecology of a large multi-authored document — say, an accident report about a plane crash — would permit only the largest generalizations about the ecology. In contrast, we are after much finer-grained or "higher resolution" mapping of a much more limited interaction. Here are some examples of the types and scale of rhetorical interactions that would make for good mapping:

- An instruction manual or online help file for a device you own
- A Facebook status update, Pinterest pin, or Instagram post with a short string of comments in response