

The rhetorical situation

According to the Sacramento State University Writing Handbook, the rhetorical situation refers to “the primary features of any college writing situation”. However, the same source mentions that many well-known rhetoricians have defined this concept in various different ways, which only opens the door to the idea that this concept has been constantly modified to suit the corresponding characteristics of the writers of the time.

Furthermore, before even considering to modify the existing definitions that others have given to this concept of the rhetorical situation, it is important to describe some of the aspects that characterize this term-- purpose, audience, persona, text, and context. In an academic environment, the purpose not only includes goals set by the writer but it also involves the purpose that is dictated by both the assignment itself and the audience that the writer is trying to reach. Moreover, the audience in an academic environment the teachers are often the ones with the role of the audience that evaluates, comments, and debates the arguments of the writer. However, this role of the audience can vary infinitely given that they can act differently depending on the circumstances surrounding the work produced by the writer. On the other side, within the same environment, the persona is the general term to define the way that an author chooses to adopt in their writing and present themselves to the readers, which at the same time includes the voice, stance, tone, and style. Additionally, this also includes other important subterms like the tone, style, and voice of the writer. In a similar way, the term text simply refers to any form of expression that communicates the purpose of the author of such a piece of work, including a research paper, lab report, web site, blog, brochure, etc. And finally, the context refers to the general factors that vary from social, cultural, and historical characteristics that influence a particular rhetorical situation.